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S E R M O N S

ON SEVERAL

SUBJECTS AND OCCASIONS.

By JOHN WARNEFORD, B.D.

LATE CAMDEN PROFESSOR OF HISTORY;

RECTOR OF BASSINGHAM, LINCOLNSHIRE;

AND FORMERLY

FELLOW OF CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE,

OXFORD.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

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15

S E R M O N S

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By JOHN WATTS, D.D.

LATE CAMDEN PROFESSOR OF HISTORY;
RECTOR OF BASHINGHAM, LINCOLNSHIRE;

AND FORMERLY

FELLOW OF ST. PETER'S COLLEGE, OXFORD



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AND J. AND J. KILGOUR, IN BATH.

CONTENTS
OF THE
SECOND VOLUME.

SERMON I.

The Divinity of the Son of God, incarnate for the Salvation of the World, proved from the Scriptures.

Preached on CHRISTMAS DAY.

I JOHN iii. Part of Ver. 8.

FOR this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Page 1

SERMON II.

The Folly, Wickedness, and Danger of Pride.

C O N T E N T S.

I C O R. I V. 7.

Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it? 33

S E R M O N I I I.

The Duty and Benefits of Family Prayer.

M A T T. X V I I I. 20.

Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. 57

S E R M O N I V.

Human Life a State of Vanity and Sorrow.

G E N. X L V I I. Part of Ver. 9.

Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been. 87

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N V.

The Nature and Privilege of Charity.

Preached for the Benefit of a
Charity-School.

2 P E T. IV. 8.

*Above all things have fervent charity
among yourselves, for charity shall
cover the multitude of sins. III*

S E R M O N VI.

On Insincerity in Devotion.

P S A L. LXVI. 16.

*If I incline unto wickedness with mine
heart, the Lord will not hear me.*

135

CONTENTS.

SERMON VII.

The case of Naaman considered.

2 KINGS v. 18, 19.

In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself down in the house of Rimmon; when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.

And he said unto him, go, in peace.

159

SERMON VIII.

IN TWO PARTS.

On religious conversation. Part I.

EPHES. IV. 29.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which

CONTENTS

*is good to the use of edifying, that it
may minister grace unto the bearers.*

183

SERMON IX.

On Religious Conversation. Part. II.

EPHES. IV. 29.

*Let no corrupt communication proceed
out of your mouth, but that which
is good to the use of edifying, that it
may minister grace unto the bearers.*

205

SERMON X.

On Religious Resolution.

PSALM CXIX. 106.

*I have sworn, and am stedfastly pur-
posed to keep thy righteous judgments.*

233

CONTENTS.

SERMON XI.

The Propagation of Christianity the
greatest Miracle.

Preached on WHIT-SUNDAY.

JOHN XIV. 12.

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that
believeth on me, the works that I
do, shall he do also; and greater
works than these shall he do; because
I go unto the Father.* 257

S E R M O N I.

The divinity of the Son of God, incarnate for the salvation of the world, proved from the scriptures.

Preached on Christmas Day.

I JOHN iii. Part of v. 8.

For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the Devil.

FROM these words (which are a concise description of the whole Christian scheme) I shall take occasion to consider,

VOL. II.

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First,

First, the character or quality of the person who is here said to have been *manifested*; He was *the Son of God*;

Secondly, what is meant by his having been so *manifested*; and,

Thirdly, the end or *purpose* for which He *was manifested*, viz. *that He might destroy the works of the devil*.

First, then, the person who is here said to have been *manifested*, was *the Son of God*, and that in the highest and strictest sense of the expression; being co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, the most high God, the first cause and supreme disposer of all things, or, in other words, having partaken of the divine nature from all eternity, and consequently being Himself truly and properly God.

For

For that He, who is called *the Son of God* in the text, is really no less a personage than we have in the above words represented Him to be, may abundantly be made to appear from the plainest and most explicit authority of holy writ. For satisfaction's sake then let us refer to this authority.

The first passage I shall quote in proof of the divinity of our Saviour, is the beginning of the epistle to the Hebrews. “ God, who at sundry
“ times and in divers manners spake in
“ times past to our fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken
“ unto us by his Son; whom He hath
“ appointed heir of all things, by whom
“ also He made the worlds; who, being
“ the brightness of his glory and the
“ express image of his person, and up-
“ holding all things by the word of his
A 2 “ power,

*“ power, when He had by Himself
“ purged our sins, sat down on the
“ right hand of the Majesty on high.”*

A very little attention in reading this and the following chapter will discover that the apostle's argument turns entirely upon the divinity of our Saviour. The Jews boasted that they received the law by *the disposition of angels*. To this the apostle opposes, in preference to the gospel dispensation, that the author of it was infinitely superior to the angels, in that He was *the Son of God*. And in order to obviate a reply, or rather a cavil, from the same quarter, viz. that angels, and even men, are not unfrequently in scripture called *the Sons of God*, the apostle observes, that Christ had a natural right by inheritance to that glorious title; *Being made so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent*

excellent name than they. For, (as he argues) Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? Which of the angels did He ever call his begotten Son, his Son in so strict and proper a sense? The apostle proceeds to apply some passages of the psalms to our Saviour, which being manifestly spoken of God, the application of them to Christ does manifestly prove Him to be God. But to take more particular notice of the three first verses of the first chapter of this epistle. The son is opposed, as infinitely superior, to the prophets, by whom God spake in times past unto the Fathers. He is proved to be the Son, because God appointed Him heir of all things: He is proved to be God, because by Him the worlds were made, which is an act of omnipotency; and so likewise is the preservation of

what is created, which is also attributed to Him in the words, *upholding all things by the word of his power*. Lastly, the nature or manner of his Sonship is described and represented to us, as far as it can be described or represented, under two apt similitudes. His issuing from and co-eternity with the Father are signified by his being *the brightness*, or effulgence *of his glory*, as the rays of light necessarily flow from the sun; his co-equality in his attributes and perfections is figured out by his being styled *the express image* or stamp of *his person*, i. e. by his exactly resembling the Father, as the thing that receives the impression does that which gives it.

I shall next cite a very remarkable passage in the 2d chapter of the epistle to the Colossians at the 9th verse, where

S E R M O N I. 7

where St. Paul, having strongly exhorted them to continue *established in the faith*, and, *as they had received Christ, so to walk in him*, immediately subjoins; *for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*. Can words be stronger or more expressive? In Him *dwelleth*, does not only rest for a time, but abideth the *fullness*, not only a share or portion of, but the whole entire and perfect Godhead, *bodily*, i. e. the real man Christ Jesus; whom (as it is expressed in another place) his disciples had *seen with their eyes*, and whom their hands *had handled*, is really and truly God.

Equally to our purpose likewise are the 6th, 7th, and 8th verses of the epistle to the Philippians, who are exhorted to humility from the most remarkable instance of it which Christ gave: *Who, being in the form*

of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, (or, as the word is more properly translated, emptied Himself,) and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Now, that by the expression of his *being in the form of God* is meant strictly and properly that He partook of the Divine Nature and Essence, is plain from what follows, that He *thought it not robbery to be equal with God*, and likewise from the same sort of expressions being made use of afterwards, where he is said to be *made in the likeness of men*, and to be *found in fashion as a man*. Now that he was really and substantially a man, there needs no other proof than what follows, viz. that He suffered death.

S E R M O N I. 9

death. It is said likewise, that *He emptied Himself*. But of what did He *empty* or divest *Himself*? Of a reality sure, not of a form only, and appearance of something of which He was not truly possessor. Of that which He actually had, not of that which He only seemed to have. In other words, He *emptied Himself* of his divinity by a voluntary act of his own divine power, in like manner as He is said to have *humiliated Himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*.

St. John in the writing of his gospel is supposed to have had two particular views; First, to confute a set of hereticks, who arrogantly pretending to all knowledge were most notoriously mistaken in their notions respecting the very fundamentals of Christianity; Secondly, to supply the
omissions

omissions of the other evangelists. And to these ends it is very observable, how full and express he is on this subject of our Saviour's divinity. Indeed this apostle is not so much an historian as a divine; in which character he begins his gospel with that most remarkable passage, which so strongly maintains and enforces the doctrine before us. *In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God; and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.* These texts so clearly and directly assert the divinity of our Saviour, and the attributes of his eternity and omnipotence, that any paraphrase would rather weaken than illustrate the force of them.

But

S E R M O N I. 11

But let us refer to a few of the most signal declarations made by our blessed Saviour Himself concerning this great point, as we find them recorded by this evangelist. The first I would point out to you is that which we meet with in his conference with Nicodemus at the 13th verse of the 3d chapter: *No man (saith our Lord) hath ascended up into heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven.* Here our blessed Lord affirms that *He came down from heaven,* i. e. in respect of the human nature which He assumed, but nevertheless was still *in heaven* in respect of his divine nature which was omnipresent.

The next instance of a still more express declaration to the same effect, is in the 8th chapter, at the 58th verse;

verse; where, in a dispute with the Jews, who were offended at his *hard sayings* as they thought them, and upbraided him with a supposed absurdity in his reasoning, in that he seemed to make himself co-temporary with Abraham, our Lord peremptorily rejoins; *Verily, verily I say unto you, before Abraham was, I AM.* In this place He not only asserts his pre-existence to Abraham, but his eternity and godhead, as He does not barely say, *Before Abraham was, I was,* which had been sufficient to have proved his point, but He says, *I AM*: He assumes that incommunicable name of God, which is so emphatically expressive of his eternal and independent existence.

These are explicit assertions of our Lord's divinity from his own mouth; for the truth of which He Himself
appeals

appeals to his miracles. In an argument with the unbelieving Jews, John, x. 36, 37, 38. *Say ye of Him, He asks, whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in Him.* And again, Ch. xiv, in an argument with Philip, after having said, *He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father;* He thus expostulates; *Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very works sake.* And surely nothing can be more forcible and conclusive than this reasoning. For miracles, *the works of the Father,* the God of nature, who only can suspend or alter its ordinary course,
are

are the proper evidences of a divine commission. Whoever produces these credentials without fraud or imposture has an undoubted right to our belief of the doctrines he advances; and therefore, when our Saviour herein declares that *God is in Him and He in God*, i. e. that he is co-equal and co-existent with God, this declaration of his, supported by the miracles to which He appeals in confirmation of it, is a clear and convincing proof of his divinity. Who should hesitate a moment to subscribe to whatever God Almighty has thus set his seal to?

These authorities will, I presume, be more than sufficient for the satisfaction of any sober and well-disposed Christian; and therefore, without enlarging farther upon this fundamental article, (as, would time permit

permit, I easily might) or staying to refute the idle or insolent exceptions of infidels or hereticks, (which is done effectually to my hands) I shall dismiss this branch of my subject with just observing, that, if there had been but few, nay even one passage in the New Testament that seemed clearly to favour such a doctrine as this, it would be a strong presumptive proof of the truth of it. I think this may be said, when we consider the consequence and importance of this doctrine. What shall we say then, when we see the whole tenour of these inspired writings strongly inculcating this doctrine; when we meet with so many express assertions of our Saviour's divinity, both in his own declarations and elsewhere; when we find the names of God, his essential attributes of infinite power, wisdom, &c. ascribed to

to Him throughout the whole? What shall we say? or rather, must we not say, *Lord, we believe?* Who that has found notions of the Deity, of his goodness and purity, can suppose that the Christian religion, that last and perfect revelation of his will, the main design of which was to extirpate idolatry, should not only favour and countenance it, but directly betray men into the very grossness of it? And this certainly is the case if Christ is not God: for Christianity plainly enjoins us to call Him so, to think Him so, and to adore Him as such. Nay, upon any other supposition but that Christ is really God, how strange and unaccountable would be the following passage, at the conclusion of the first epistle general of St. John? *We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that*

that is true ; and we are in Him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. We see here that the believing that Jesus Christ is *the true God* is directly opposed to idolatry, which sets this point in so clear a light, that with this text I shall conclude what I have collected for the proof of it. And I think there remains no shadow of doubt but that this Jesus (our Saviour) this Christ (the anointed of the Lord) this *Word of God*, was also as properly and truly *Immanuel*, or, *God with us*.

I proceed therefore, in the second place, to consider, what is meant by his being *made manifest*. Now this expression plainly means that this Divine Person took our nature upon Him. The point of our Saviour's

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incarnation is indeed so fully and even minutely revealed in the New Testament, that there is no occasion to dwell upon it. And yet, notwithstanding the clearness and expressness of the gospel on this article, there sprung up two early heresies concerning it. The one denied the reality of Christ's body or flesh; the other allowed Him that, but denied that He had also a human soul. As for the former, it is hardly worth our notice, since it does not admit the evidence of the apostle's senses. Let us only turn to the beginning of St. John's first epistle. *That which was from the beginning, says he, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life,*

life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us :) That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you. Can language afford stronger words to express the *manifestation of God in the flesh*? After reading such a passage as this, to doubt of the reality of our Saviour's body, to suppose that the apostles conversed with a spectre, or that the Jew crucified an apparition, is to get rid of a difficulty by having recourse to absurdities, and to undermine the very foundations of all credit or testimony whatsoever. To doubt of our own existence would scarcely be a grosser instance of scepticism. The other notion is likewise apparently ridiculous. For how can our Lord be said to have taken our nature upon Him, and to have been made in all things like unto us, (sin only excepted) if, in fact, he only cloathed

his divinity with an outside of flesh? Is this our nature? What then becomes of the principal part of the composition, the soul? Surely, if man is to be denominated from one of his constituent parts, it should be from that which is of the greatest dignity, not from that which by itself is nothing worth. But there is no need to argue this matter: we need only consult the history of Christ's life, for a confutation of so wild an opinion. We there find him subject to the passions of the mind as well as the infirmities of the body. He *wept* on a certain occasion, on another He *looked round about Him with anger, and was grieved for the hardness of the Pharisees hearts.* Agreeably therefore to scripture, we believe that the Son of God was also truly and properly man, or, as the Athanasian creed expresses it, that
Jesus

Jefus Chrift was *perfect God, and perfect man, of a reasonable foul and human flefh, fubfifting*. As to the miraculous manner and circumftances of his birth, we take them from the evangelifts who relate them, and believe that He took the principles of his incarnation from the fupernatural influence of the Holy Spirit of God upon a pure Virgin, who continued fuch when fhe brought Him forth, or, as the apoftle's creed expreffes it, that He *was conceived by the Holy Ghofl, born of the Virgin Mary*. That this union of the two natures, the Human and Divine, is a great and incomprehenfible myftery we do not deny; but we believe it nevertheless: and that for two reafons; Firft, be-
 caufe God was the agent here, who
 (as far as our weak judgments can
 fee) might as eafily become man as
 create man; might, if He pleased,

assume a nature of which He was Himself the author. Besides we are not to judge of the acts of omnipotency by our own limited powers either of acting or conceiving: Secondly, because things in general are not to be disbelieved merely on account of its being beyond the power of our finite understandings to comprehend the manner of their existence. At this rate the objection proves a great deal too much. For in the force and consequence of it, we may doubt of the existence of God, nay of our own existence; as the Athanasian creed seems to argue, when it sets forth the incarnation of Christ by the similitude of the union of body and soul. *For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ; i. e. as to the manner how, one union is as strange and unaccountable as the other;*

S E R M O N I. 23

other ; but the one, viz. the union of our souls and bodies, we are nevertheless certain of ; and why then, should the other *be thought a thing incredible ?*

But, though the incarnation of the Son of God, the appearance of the divine *Λογος* in the flesh, be primarily intended by his being made *manifest*, yet the display of his sacred character in the doctrine He taught, and the miracles He wrought in confirmation of it, must likewise be understood to be included in that expression. The Son of God did not barely assume our nature, but in that nature *manifested forth his glory by deed and word*, for the accomplishment of his *purpose*, which was *that he might destroy the works of the devil*. And this *purpose* was what I proposed in the third and last place to consider. Now

Now by *the works of the devil* we are to understand sin and death, which were introduced into the world by the great enemy of mankind; the cause and the effect; sin the forfeiture death, the penalty. Sin may be said to *have dominion over us*, as the apostle to the Gentiles speaks, or to *reign in our mortal bodies*, as he elsewhere expresses himself, in respect either of the natural corruption derived to us from the disobedience of the first transgressor, or of the punishment to which we thereby became obnoxious, viz. death temporal and eternal. And this dominion our blessed Saviour has destroyed, not absolutely indeed, not by a restoration of fallen man to a state of innocence and immortality (for this could not have been done consistently with the satisfaction due to offended justice) but consequentially and effectually,

fectually, by giving *Himself a ransom for all, by bearing our sins in his own body on the tree*, by rendering our sincere, though imperfect obedience, acceptable to God through the invaluable merits of that sacrifice, by graciously affording us the means of salvation, and, in a word, by putting us in a capacity of reinstating ourselves in the Divine Favour, and thereby qualifying ourselves for blessed *mansions in the kingdom of heaven.*

---Under these advantageous and comfortable circumstances, how different is the situation of the Christian from that of the Heathen world!

---The doctrine of a future state is peculiarly Christian; it was ascertained by Him only, who *brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*---The doctrine of *repentance unto life*, which hath a direct aspect to such future state, or, in other words,

words, the doctrine of *repentance for the remission of sins* through the merits of our blessed Redeemer, is peculiarly Christian.---And, again, the doctrine of *grace to help in time of need*, or of Divine Grace powerfully influencing, but not irresistibly impelling the human mind ;---not forcibly directing our actions, but imperceptibly co-operating with our own earnest endeavours to discharge our manifold obligations ; the doctrine, I say, of assisting, animating, preventing, and renewing grace, is peculiarly Christian. It is with respect to the blessed efficacy of this supernatural aid and support in our spiritual warfare, that the dispenser of it, the third person of the holy Trinity, is expressly styled in scripture, *The Comforter* ; as the dispensation itself is emphatically called *Grace* ; i. e. favour in the highest degree ; and a
most

S E R M O N I. 27

most signal and illustrious instance of
good will to men.

And now having gone through a subject so suitable to the solemnity of this day, and having, I trust, sufficiently evinced the divinity of that person who thereon condescended to appear in our nature, and shewn how truly he has accomplished the gracious design which moved him to this amazing condescension; something by way of reflection and application should naturally follow. But I shall not be long in pointing out what influence the belief of this doctrine ought to have upon our practice; because the close and necessary connection of the one with the other so evidently appears from the nature of the doctrine itself. Do we believe that *Jesus Christ came into the world to save repenting sinners?* Shall we
then

then continue finners? Shall we refuse to repent and *amend our ways*, and so frustrate his gracious purpose by neglecting to fulfil the easy and reasonable conditions of the gospel? Shall we render *the cross of Christ of none effect to us*, and evacuate the final and most wonderful dispensation of infinite wisdom and mercy? Shall we *do despite to the Spirit of Grace*? Shall we *grieve that Holy Spirit of God*, whereby, if we are not wanting to ourselves, we may be *sealed unto the day of redemption*? In short, we may ask the Apostle's question upon this occasion; *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation*?--- What indeed can be said in excuse or extenuation of their folly and perverseness, who *love darkness rather than light*, and will not be for ever happy, because, having been created free-agents and necessarily continuing such,

such, they have it in their power to be eternally miserable? But I hope better things of you that hear me; and, agreeably to that hope, *my prayer to God is, that you may give all diligence to add to your faith, virtue, and to walk worthy of the holy vocation wherewith ye are called; or, as it is elsewhere expressed, worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.*

Lastly, As to those affections and emotions of the mind which ought to be raised in us by the above considerations, the gratitude, admiration, and transport we ought to feel, when we reflect on the dignity of the Person who took upon Him our nature to rescue that nature from corruption and perdition; and, on the other hand, that profound humility which the sense of our own vileness and unworthiness

worthiness should create in us.---
These are passions which will be produced in us by contemplation on the subject before us, or by nothing, not by *the tongues of men*, or even of *angels*. For seriousness and conviction are the two only things necessary to our being properly affected in this matter. If we firmly believe the doctrine of the incarnation, and, its consequence, the redemption of fallen man, and suffer our thoughts to dwell upon the consideration of it, we shall find that it is a subject not only the most deserving but the most fit of all others to employ all our faculties and the noblest affections of our minds in their full vigour and utmost stretch. And principally if we reflect on the happy alteration of man's condition effected by this most amazing act of divine love, we must be filled with the extremest joy which our nature
can

S E R M O N I. 31

can be sensible of. This joy must be of that devout, that heavenly kind, which is well expressed by *singing and making melody in our hearts unto the Lord*, as the apostle speaks. And in our outward demonstrations of it we must never forget the subject of the angelical hymn on the day of our blessed Lord's nativity; *Glory be to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will towards men.*

S E R M O N I I .

The folly, wickedness, and danger
of pride.

I C O R . I V . 7 .

*Who maketh thee to differ from another?
And what hast thou that thou didst
not receive? Now, if thou didst re-
ceive it, why dost thou glory as if
thou hadst not received it?*

WHAT was the immediate
occasion of these words of the
great apostle of the Gentiles, we shall
see presently ; and mean while it will
abundantly suffice to observe that
they contain a general doctrine, and
a censure and condemnation of a vice

V O L . I I .

C

com-

common to every age of the world, and, as strange as it may seem, to almost every condition and situation of human life.---I need not tell you, I mean the vice of pride ; which, if we judge from the practice of the world in general, we might be led to conclude *made* for all men. It may not improperly be called the universal passion. *The wise man* glories in his wisdom, *the mighty man* in his might, and *the rich man* in his riches ; and who is there scarcely but hath some endowment of body or mind, some qualification natural or fortuitous, real or imaginary, that puffs him with vanity, and renders him considerable in his own eyes ? Nay, for want of usually reputed accomplishments, and the more specious pretences for pride, men will value themselves upon their particularities, their humours, and even their vices ;
and

and as there are some who make a boast of their supposed excellencies, so there are others *whose glory is in their shame*.---The extravagance, or rather the abominableness of pride in the last mentioned instances, is too glaring to be insisted upon; and the folly, the unreasonableness, and the sinfulness of the same in the other cases is, one would think, sufficiently apparent from this consideration, that all we have and all we enjoy is *the gift of God*. *What hast thou*, asks the apostle in the text, *that thou didst not receive?* And the question demands a self-condemning answer; since no man can pretend to say that he is the author of any distinction or excellence he perceives in himself, or that he hath any thing which he hath not immediately, or ultimately, received from God. This being allowed, the conscience will urge home St *Paul's* just rebuke, im-

36 S E R M O N I I.

plied in the next question,---*Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?*

From this passage of scripture therefore I shall take occasion to enquire more fully into the principal and most plausible grounds of human glorying, and to shew the insufficiency, and consequently the unreasonableness, and impiety of the same.

And then I shall conclude with a few words of practical inference and application.

Let us first then enquire more fully into the principal and most plausible grounds of human glorying, in order to shew the insufficiency, and consequently the unreasonableness and impiety of the same.

What

S E R M O N I I. 37

What gave occasion to the apostle's reproof in the words of the text was the boast made by the *Corinthians* of those extraordinary gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, by which themselves and their pastors and teachers were distinguished from unbelievers and from one another. There seems to have been *a strife among them* with regard to the excellence of the endowments of their several instructors; and consequently to their own proficiency under *the Gospel of the grace of God*.---One saith, *I am of Paul*, and another *I am of Apollos*.---But the apostle calls this contention *carnal*; and thereby not barely discountenances, but in effect absolutely forbids all ostentation of this sort, as altogether favouring of human pride. *Who is Paul*, says he, *and who is Apollos*, but *ministers by whom ye believed*, even as the Lord gave to every

man? And in the words of the text he asks, *who maketh thee to differ from another?* This is striking indeed at the very root of vanity: for if even the possession of these spiritual endowments, by which the primitive Christians may properly be said to have been dignified as well as distinguished;---if those wonderful *diversities* of supernatural gifts afforded ground for rejoicing only, and not for glorying, much less pretence surely shall we find for the same at this day, in our ordinary graces and qualifications; in our moral or our intellectual accomplishments. And yet these are continually the foundations of self-conceit. There are but too many for instance, who value themselves upon being righteous, and *despise others*.---But do we call ourselves Christians, and at the same time want to be told that *by the grace of God*, we are what we

we are; that *we are not sufficient of ourselves to think or do any thing good as of ourselves, but that our sufficiency is of God?* In truth, nothing can be more opposite to, and inconsistent with self-exaltation than the scripture representations, which set forth the whole man, in every part and faculty of soul and body, as the purchase and property of redeeming and sanctifying grace. Man in his moral capacity is in a very particular sense a receiver; a receiver, not by the restoration of his natural and original powers, but by an adventitious and infused strength. His spiritual life, or power of doing the will of God, and *working out* his own final happiness, depends upon a continued grant and supply from heaven. *Where is boasting then? It is manifestly excluded* from so forlorn and dependent a state; wherein all that is left for a man to act consists in using the assistance that is lent

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him.

him. He can do enough to make himself accountable, but not enough to render him accepted; his sufficiency in that respect being the free *gift of God*. Revelation at the same time that it restores the hopes, strongly evidences the insufficiency and impotence of fallen nature; and the necessity of grace on the one hand, and the promise of it when properly applied for on the other, are at once mortifying and encouraging considerations.

And let it farther be remembered that though we are sanctified by grace, we are by no means perfected by it. Human nature in its best state is in a state of imperfection. *Who can tell how oft he offendeth?* The Psalmist asks the question, and the apostle may be understood in the following words to answer him;---

In

S E R M O N II. 41

In many things we offend all. If then our supposed virtues and moral excellencies are really the *fruit of the spirit*, the blessed product of heavenly influence upon our minds; and if our numberless errors, failings, and negligences be truly and properly our own, here is evidently no ground for pride, but much, very much for humiliation.

And, yet farther, this argument may be viewed in another light.--- The purity and innocence of life and manners which men are sometimes ready to picque themselves upon, are frequently owing not to personal rectitude of heart or principle, (as at best is vainly imagined) but to accidental, or rather providential circumstances; such as delicacy, or, if you please, defect of constitution; the advantage of education; a state of life happily removed

removed in a great measure from scenes of temptation ; the benefit of good examples ; the absence of bad ones ; the intervention of sickness ; or the seasonableness of affliction. These things will make one man *to differ from another* ; but as these things are the result of his wise and gracious appointment who is the great disposer of events, and not of our own choice, or prudence, (to speak of them in general,) we have surely much greater reason to be humbly thankful for the happy consequences of them, than to assume the least degree of merit to ourselves from them ; or to demean ourselves on their account with an arrogance ungrateful to God, or uncharitable to our neighbour.

Again. Many of the foregoing considerations may be applied to the case of our intellectual abilities and accomplishments ; which, next to our moral
and

and religious attainments, lay the most specious foundation for human glory.

---That God is the author of all distinction between his creatures in general, as well as between man and man, is a truth which speculation acknowledges, but practice too often shamefully denies. The reasonable soul is that which, in its nature, fundamentally distinguishes men from all other animals; and, signally, in the several degrees of its perfection, from each other. Of this faculty of reason therefore man is apt to be, if not absolutely, at least comparatively vain.

---But, I would ask, do we *make* our *boast* in the possession of our understandings, or in the use and improvement of them?---If in the former, let it be remembered, that our rational talent is as much received as any other circumstance of our birth; and that God *makes* us to *differ* in this respect

respect just as he does in our features, our complexions, or our statures. A man *exalting himself*, and *despising others*, on account of the superior strength and acuteness of his parts, must doubtless be humbled and ashamed to recollect, that he is proud of a different texture of his brain, or of a freer circulation of his blood, and the other humours of his body ; for these are the circumstances that constitute the difference betwixt the brightest genius and an idiot.--- Besides, the precariousness of the tenure by which the intellectual powers are held, is another depressing consideration. They are at the mercy, as I may say, of a number of casualties so called, are frequently injured by bodily disorders, and impaired, I suppose, universally by age. A common distemper will blunt the sharpest wit, and a slight pain confound the soundest

S E R M O N I I. 45

soundest judgment.---Shall we then be proud of faculties of which we cannot procure the possession, nor prevent the loss or the diminution?

But though our understandings are confessedly the *gift of God*, it may be asked, may not the improvement, and the cultivation of them, be called our own?---Apparently they may indeed; but by no means in strictness of propriety.---For the question is, whether the man who makes a wise and proper use of his talents, does not *do this* not merely *as of the ability*, but likewise as of the inclination *which God giveth*?---Is not the very disposition in all intellectual as well as moral cases one of those *good and perfect gifts* which *cometh from above*? If so, our care, our industry, and our application cannot justly be put to a personal account; and, consequently,
though

though they may minister abundant occasion for satisfaction, will afford none at all for vain-glory and self-conceit.

Further, to all intellectual improvements, talents and inclinations are not more necessary than opportunities. To whom then are we indebted for these? Whom may we thank for the friends, or the fortune, which procured us the benefits of an early and liberal education?---Who affords us sufficient leisure in life for the farther cultivation of our natural abilities?---Who enables us to pursue our studies by blessing us with health, and a suitable constitution?---More questions might be asked to the same effect; but it will suffice to remark that, with regard to these things, we cannot be looked upon in any other light than that of receivers;
and

and that we are under unspeakable obligations to the gracious disposal of divine providence for those mental endowments and excellencies which we are so ready to take a pride in, and to treat others contemptuously for the want of; who, at the same time, it is possible, would have made greater improvements than ourselves, with equal, or even fewer advantages.

After all, how extremely weak and deficient at best is human wisdom? ---How vast is the region of science, and how little is discovered of it? ---The noblest productions of genius are rather efforts than acquisitions: and the deepest researches of philosophy rest at length on unknown principles, and terminate in obscurity. In short, we seem to be at full as great a distance from intellectual as
from

from moral perfection; and are no more able to attain to exact knowledge than to finless innocency. All merit in this respect is merely comparative; and, in fact, the main difference between the most knowing, and the most illiterate of mankind, may fairly be said to consist in the distinction which we must make betwixt plain simplicity and decorated ignorance.---But I forbear to enlarge upon so trite a topic; and shall only just observe farther under this head, that if even the most judicious and pious application of our understandings in the search of knowledge, in the refinement of arts, in illustration of the works of providence, or elucidation of revealed truth, will not furnish us with any grounds for pride; little should they glory, or, more properly, much should they be confounded, who *turn* the capacity which

which God has blest them with into *lasciviousness*, and prostitute fine parts, and great abilities in the cause of vice, and to purposes of irreligion and immorality.

And now, having said thus much upon the preceding articles, it will be unnecessary to dwell on things of far inferior consideration; or formally to prove the vanity, the unreasonableness, and the impiety of glorying in what we commonly call the goods of nature, and of fortune; such as beauty, strength, riches, and honour. ---Pride, on account of these external accomplishments, these corporeal advantages, is odious and contemptible in the eye of the world itself; and even those who give themselves no concern about its wickedness, are provoked by the superciliousness, and disgusted by the folly of it. It will

suffice then to aver upon these grounds that pride, with respect to all and every of the particulars above-mentioned, is extremely ridiculous in its own nature, and utterly abominable in the sight of God, for the following obvious and already intimated reasons ;---because all these things are the gifts of *his* creation ; *his* infusion ; or *his* providence ;---because we can neither possess, nor preserve and retain them at pleasure ; ---because the very best of them are given us in trust only, and are talents for which we must hereafter be accountable ;---and consequently because they will finally redound to our honour or to our dispraise ; to our eternal shame, or everlasting glory, as we shall be found prudently and piously to have used, or weakly and presumptuously to have abused them.

But

But though pride be a quality, or, not to compliment it with so soft a name, a vice altogether offensive both to God and man, yet is there no such thing as an honest desire of distinction, and a laudable love of fame? Or is there no emulation of a different nature from that which is ranked by the apostle among *the works of the flesh*?---Beyond all doubt such questions as these must be answered in the affirmative.---The wise man tells us, *A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches*; and if we follow St. Paul's example, *this we shall do---forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, we shall press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*; or, if we obey the precept of the same apostle, we shall *so run* our spiritual race, that we may obtain a crown

incorruptible.---You see then we are commanded to endeavour to excel in piety and godliness, and, by parity of reason, in whatsoever things are praise-worthy and *of good report*; while at the same time it is impossible to excel without a consciousness of excellence, and a satisfaction arising from that consciousness.---But all this while our grand aim and object ought to be the promotion of God's glory. The good man will regard fame not as the end, but the concomitant of virtue; he will moderately and modestly enjoy praise not as the reward, but the consequence of well-doing. In prosecution of the above-mentioned great aim, his emulation will be untinctured with the least degree of envy; it will be his wish rather to deserve than to acquire popular reputation; and he will persevere in a godly and
Christian

S E R M O N II. 53

Christian course of life, neither a better man for the applause and encouragement it may be attended with, nor a worse for the reproach, the disgrace, or even the distress which is sometimes incurred by it. Under these circumstances, he will rejoice in the comfortable *testimony* of a good conscience; or, if he *glories*, he will *glory only in the Lord*.

I am now to conclude with a few words of practical inference and application.

Now that the foregoing considerations may have the stronger influence on our conduct, we may from the manifest unreasonableness, and impiety of pride in all instances, take occasion to infer more at large the extreme danger of it, both with respect to this world, and the next.---

With respect even to this world we cannot but observe, that the continuance of our enjoyment of those good things of all denominations which we have received at the hand of God will depend much on our own piety and discretion.---If the *rich man* be disposed to glory in his riches, let him recollect, that it is the Lord who *giveth*, and *taketh away*; who *bringeth low*, and *lifteth up*.---If the *mighty man* is inclined to glory in his might, let him remember, that God *putteth down the mighty from their seats*; and that *by strength shall no man prevail*.---If the *wise man* would glory in his wisdom, let him be reminded, that God *taketh the wise in their own craftiness*; and that *he disappointeth the devices of the crafty*, so that their hands *cannot perform their enterprize*.---Instances of immediate and dreadful inflictions on human
vanity

vanity are recorded for our examples. Witness the severe punishment of *Nebuchadnezzar*, and the miserable end of *Herod*; who respectively gave not God the glory, the former of his greatness, the latter of his eloquence.--- But the danger of spiritual pride is what we ought principally to insist upon.---*Be not high-minded, but fear*, says our apostle; which advice each of us may apply to himself in his Christian capacity.---To trust in ourselves that we are *righteous* is to provoke God, “without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy,” to take his holy spirit from us. For we are expressly assured, that he *resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble*. And this is a most awful consideration which directly refers us to the world to come.---Left wholly to ourselves, and destitute of divine assistance, how shall we be able to

56 S E R M O N II.

work out our own salvation? This is a work which must be accomplished *with fearing and trembling*;---with an absolute renunciation of personal merit, or natural powers; with a true *faith in God*, and a firm reliance on that blessed succour and support which *descendeth from above*.---In a word, let us remember, that to the *poor in spirit the kingdom of heaven* is expressly and particularly promised by the *meek and lowly Jesus*;---that if on any account we are *lifted up with pride*, we shall be in danger of *falling into the condemnation of the devil*,---and that we are in all cases and circumstances concerned, in point of prudence as well as piety, to *humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God*, that he may exalt us in due time.

S E R M O N III.

The duty and benefits of family prayer.

M A T T. XVIII. 20.

Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

TH E S E words of our blessed Saviour respect divine worship in general, but may be considered as particularly encouraging private or family devotion :---a duty, of which the neglect hath unhappily of late been, I fear, as universal as heretofore was

58 S E R M O N III.

was the observance. The subject is therefore seasonable; as well as important; and will be worth your best attention in many points of view. I shall accordingly, without farther preface, recommend and enforce the duty of family-prayer, from the following considerations :

First, the import of scriptural precept :

Secondly, the weight of example :

Thirdly, the evident reasonableness of the duty itself :

Fourthly, the advantages derivable from it :

Fifthly, the folly, and---

Sixthly, the danger of neglecting it.

Upon all which considerations I shall found an earnest exhortation to its serious and constant performance ;
removing

removing some trivial objections which may be formed against it, and intermixing a few hints of direction, regarding the manner of discharging it.

The first consideration mentioned was the import of scriptural precept. ---I said, *import*; ---because, it will be acknowledged, we cannot produce any direct, express command enjoining the duty in question. ---And, I pray, what express, or literal command have we for *assembling ourselves together* twice every Lord's day, for the purpose of public worship, in the *great congregation*? These, by the way, are things dictated by our common reason, which, in such instances, cannot mistake the sense and scope of scripture. ---That God is to be worshipped is a most obvious truth; and if so, it is as certain he is to be worshipped

shipped under every character we sustain ; or, in other words, in our personal, our domestic, and our social capacities.---Accordingly, though no particular passage of holy writ prescribing the duty of family prayer in so many words is to be found, yet is there no want of general precepts in which it is plainly implied, and from which it is necessarily inferred. Such are all those (which are too many and too well known to be repeated) that require us to serve and honour God all possible ways, and with all our powers, faculties, and opportunities ; and to use all means of sanctifying our own souls, and edifying our brethren ; especially those who are under our immediate care, or of our *own household*.---Now if it be very manifest (as it most surely is) that these good purposes are eminently served by the regular practice of family

mily-devotion, then it follows that the duty must be included in those general precepts and injunctions.---But what think ye of our Saviour's own words to his disciples, which you have heard in the text? ---The whole passage runs thus.---*I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that ye shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*---Are not the expressions here made use of *most* applicable (as was before intimated) to the prayers offered up by the members of families in common? For are not such *two or three*, or a small number, assembled, or *gathered together* in Christ's name?---And does not the blessing promised, *viz.* his presence, and his heavenly Father's acceptance of our petitions, if they be

be duly presented to him, absolutely presuppose and imply the duty itself? ---And it is farther observable here, that the excellent form of prayer which he taught his disciples, and which we distinguish by the name of the *Lord's prayer*, though highly fit and proper to be used in public, and secret worship, is so framed in several of its petitions, as to seem peculiarly designed for the use of a family, as you cannot but take notice upon the recollection of it without my repeating them.

But it is time to proceed to the second consideration by which this duty is enforced; *viz.* that of the example of pious and godly men in all ages.---We are told in the 4th Ch. of Gen. v. 26. that *when Enos was born to Seth, then began men to call upon the name of the Lord: i. e. as soon*

soon as there began to be a family in the pious line of *Seth*, God's worship was set up in it.---The example of holy *Job* may be produced likewise in this place, to the same purpose; who, we are informed, *sanctified* his family by *sacrifices* and oblations, and all suitable rites of domestic devotion. ---And, beyond all doubt, this godly custom was kept up by that illustrious patriarch, the faithful *Abraham*; of whom God himself testifies, that he knew that he would *command his children, and his household after him, that they might keep the way of the Lord, &c.*---Now if he was a person so zealous for the honour of God, and the maintenance of the true religion, as is here represented, it must be supposed that he set his family an example of every kind of piety and devotion; and, as there was then no established church, his house must have

have been the place of worship, and his family the congregation.---Nor shall we be at a loss for instances of domestic worship in later days, and after the establishment of a national religion. Witness the memorable example of *Joshua*, who amidst an almost total defection of a people, ever prone to relapse into idolatry, declared publicly his pious resolution of continuing in the profession of the true religion in the following terms;---*as for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.*---Again, ---let us turn to the 11th Ch. of *St. Luke's Gospel*, and attentively consider what we read in the beginning of it.---*And it came to pass as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, when ye pray, say---&c.* Then follows

follows the admirable form above taken notice of. In this passage we see our blessed Lord was praying in company with his disciples; and if he prayed in the presence of his disciples, it is more than probable that he prayed with them, not secretly, by himself; and if so, here is the example of Christ himself for family devotion; his disciples being, in a proper sense, his family.---As for the primitive Christians, we have abundant reason to be satisfied, that they neglected not so decent, so pious a service, but performed it constantly with much zeal, and general edification.----Neither is the example of our own fore-fathers wanting to excite us to family-prayer. For this truly godly custom was formerly much more observed in this nation. And it was first brought into discredit, and disuse with almost *all*, because *some* who were enthusiasts, or hypocrites, had

66 S E R M O N III.

abused it. But whether this *was* then, or *should* be now, a sufficient reason for neglecting it, I submit to the consideration of any sober, thinking person. All religion has been, and may be perverted to the worst of purposes; but is this any argument that religion should be thrown aside, and irreligion or profaneness established by a law? In short, the custom in question is a pious, and a reasonable one too; and as such I am

Thirdly, as I proposed, to enforce and recommend it.---

Now the reasonableness of prayer in our families, as it is what may in a great measure appear from the preceding considerations, so will it be more fully evinced by a few additional reflections;---as first, that every

S E R M O N III. 67

every family is a little society. And is it right or reasonable, that there should be any society which does not worship God? Or is the devotion of some of the particular members thereof any more the devotion of that society, than it is the worship of a whole congregation of Christians? And has not every family need of God's protection; and has it not its wants to be supplied, as well as larger bodies of men, or private persons?---Besides, let it be considered, that 'tis our duty to set a good example to our children, and servants. And what can be a more reasonable mode of doing so than this pious practice of praying with them? They most days, it is to be feared, are witnesses of our sinfulness, or at least of our folly, in many instances; as in rash, hasty expressions; in taking God's name in vain; and other faults

68 S E R M O N III.

and infirmities of common conversation. How edifying then must it be for them to hear us confessing our unworthiness in all respects, humbly imploring pardon and forgiveness, and the assistance of divine grace for a better government of ourselves for the time to come? And when in time they shall perceive in us an alteration for the better, (as will certainly be the case, if we are sincere in our prayers) must not this cause them to give *glory to God*? And will they not become more serious and earnest in their own devotions from the view of such a blessed effect?--- Accordingly, the reasonableness of this godly practice will appear farther from the

Fourth consideration of its advantages.----These are manifold, and numbers are concerned in them; as
our

our country, our families, and ourselves.---While we are bringing up our families in the fear and service of God, (of which the pious custom I am recommending must be allowed to be a principal part, and expression,) we are training up good and loyal subjects to the government; faithful members of the established church; and useful friends, and honest neighbours: in other words, we are securing blessings both to church and state.---And with respect to our families, we are training them up in goodness, by giving them an early tincture of religion; a constant sense of their dependence upon God for all blessings, temporal, and spiritual; and of their being accountable to him for their daily actions:---This will be one of the readiest methods we can take to preserve them from all vice and excess, which are real misery

under the flattering appearance of pleasure; and to make their duty easy and delightful, which is their true happiness even in this world; and will ensure to them their everlasting happiness in heaven.---Now if we have any thing in us of that Christian charity, which is the badge of our profession, and which rejoiceth in promoting the good of others, must not our hearts fervently desire to be thus happily instrumental towards the present peace and future felicity of those that dwell with us, and are under our immediate care and inspection?---As for the advantages which we shall reap ourselves by serving God in our families, they are many and evident, and will be found in both worlds. In this, first of all, in the satisfaction of our consciences, which is the greatest blessing on this side the grave; next, in the affectionate

S E R M O N III. 71

tionate and faithful obedience of our children and servants ; which is confessedly one of the chiefest comforts of life. For, besides that these will best learn their duty towards us by being taught to practice it towards God, there must remain in their hearts a loving and affectionate regard for those who have promoted their eternal interests ; because this must be looked upon as a real kindness, and as proceeding from the most charitable intention. And the satisfaction which must arise to us from hence will follow us into heaven, and make part of our happiness even there, when we shall see our children and servants partakers of its unspeakable joys, joining with us to all eternity in adoring and praising that God in whose worship we united with one accord upon earth.---We are concerned therefore in common

dence, we see, to practice this duty; and, agreeably, the folly of neglecting it was the

Fifth consideration I mentioned. ---In speaking to a Christian congregation, I must be supposed to address myself to persons who have a sense of religion upon their minds, and are desirous of *inheriting eternal life*.--- And will such as these content themselves with doing their duty by halves, or in part, as I may say? Will they overlook, or condemn any means of improving in piety, and consequently of advancing their own salvation?----Shall we not offer up prayers and supplications to God in, and with our families, or (I might add) *enter into our closets, and pray to our Father which is in secret*, because we are called upon to *worship him among the faithful, and in the place where*

S E R M O N III. 73

where his honour dwelleth? Will not these private and home-services, as I may call them, fit and prepare us for the public devotions of the sanctuary? Will they not “nourish us “in true religion,” and cherish in us a spirit, and habit of godliness? Will not the performance of our duty in general become a more *joyful and pleasant thing* by our conscientious attention to the several particulars of it? Will not the *tabernacles of the Lord of hosts* appear more *amiable* to us, and shall we not be more *glad* to *go into the house of the Lord*, by accustoming ourselves to pious exercises, and, as it were, familiarizing devotion to us?---The question is not--- which is the most material branch of religion, or the most solemn act of worship, but whether every branch of religion is not too material, every act of worship too solemn to be neglected?

neglected?---Our attendance in *the house of the Lord* is doubtless a most essential duty; but our mere attendance there hath much more of profession, than of piety in it.---In one word, let us remember that *God is not mocked*; and that the allowances which, we are assured, he will graciously make for the weakness of our mortal nature must, in obvious propriety, be understood to respect, not the total omission of any *part* of our duty under the character of worshippers, but the at best imperfect discharge of the *whole*.---But in this as in all other instances, our duty is enforced, and pressed upon us not only by various, but also opposite motives; and therefore the danger of neglecting it was the

Sixth, and last consideration I bespoke your attention to.---And surely
we

S E R M O N III. 75

we cannot but expect to be called to a strict and severe account for our negligence in so important a particular. Let not any man think that he shall escape the judgment of God, if, when he has it in his power to promote his service, and the salvation of men, he *careth for none of these things*. Every man is obliged in charity to further the eternal happiness of his neighbour, as far as he can; but much more of his children, friends, and servants. He is a *watchman* over his own house to keep spiritual as well as worldly evils from it, and *all that dwell therein*. What, I pray, says St. Paul? *If any man provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he is worse than an infidel!*---This passage has indeed been understood to relate to the duty of children to their parents, and not to that of these to their children:

76 S E R M O N III.

children : but as the words are at least equally capable of the construction which suits our present purpose, I consider them as referring directly to the temporal, and virtually to the spiritual provision, which parents and masters are called upon to make for their own households. For it would be ridiculous to confine their duty to the least important branch of it ; or to suppose them under obligations to supply their children and dependents with every thing but the thing most needful ; with perishable food and cloathing for the body, but not with that *meat* for the soul *which endureth unto everlasting life*.---Now family devotion being one principal conveyance of this spiritual food, it will follow, that all are as much concerned to pray with their families, as to partake with them in the sustenance of this mortal life. In short,
God

God has given masters and mistresses of families authority over their own households to bring them up in his fear, and to his glory. This authority then is a talent committed to their trust; and, agreeably to their use, or abuse of it, they shall hereafter *have their reward*.---And, farther, we may easily pre-conceive how much the miseries of the other world would be aggravated by the upbraidings of those we should have taken better care of in this. How bitter, and how pungent will be the reproach;---“if ye had done your
 “duty by us, and shewn us the ways
 “of religion, we had never *come into*
 “*this place of torment*.” God forbid, I say, that any of us should incur these stinging taunts, which would be some of the most painful gnawings of the *worm that never dieth*, and add fuel to the *fire that is not quenched*.

Upon

Upon all these considerations I now proceed, in the last place, as I proposed, to ground an earnest exhortation to the serious and regular practice of this duty; in which I shall remove some trifling objections; and leave a hint or two of direction regarding the manner of performing it.

Let me exhort you then to recollect the full weight and importance of what I have been laying before you. Let the several articles I have been urging make suitable impressions on you.---Receive into your houses, with chearfulness receive this long-flighted, this stranger duty! And be assured that it will neither be impertinent, nor troublesome. It will put you to no expence, not even of your time; at least, what it takes up of *that* it will make you ample amends for in the divine blessing.

However,

S E R M O N III. 79

However, its demand upon your leisure is very moderate, so moderate as scarce to be worth mentioning. It only begs a few minutes twice in the whole day; and these it begs in Christ's name, and for the honour of God; for the edification of your families, and for the salvation of your own souls.

But perhaps it is the novelty and ununsualness of the thing that makes you averse to it.---Consider then within yourselves, whether this will be a sufficient apology hereafter. For whose fault is it that it is so unusual? That is indeed the very thing complained of, and to be remedied.---Besides, there must, and will be something disagreeably strange and uncouth attending our entrance upon any business, or design whatsoever. So that this objection holds as strongly against

80 S E R M O N III.

against every other undertaking as this. A person that had absented himself several years from church would no doubt feel this kind of uneasiness upon his new appearance there. But who will say, this is any reason why he should absent himself still longer from the place of worship?---And say not, farther, that you shall be *ashamed* to begin this pious practice *now*, which you have never used, or long omitted, or were not bred up to. What! shall we be ashamed of the honourable province which providence has assigned us of being priests, as it were, as well as rulers in our own families? What! shall we be ashamed to mend the next generation, and of the glorious as well as charitable office of increasing the number of God's servants? Nay, but how dare we to be ashamed of *glorifying* our *Father*
which

which is in heaven, by letting the light of our piety shine before men; or, how can we flight that awful threatning of our Lord and Master, who declares that he will be ashamed of those in the next world, who shall be ashamed of him, and his service, in this? Know you not that you must not follow a multitude to do evil, nor be restrained by it from doing good? Know you not that you are not to be conformed to this world, but transformed from it by the renewing of your minds?---After all, what mighty trial will you have from the world in this case?---Perhaps, some of your neighbours will deride you.---Is this so heavy a *cross* that you cannot bear it? Is this so *strait a gate* that you cannot pass through it to the performance of your duty? Shall we not serve God, and save our own souls, because fools will laugh at us

28 S E R M O N III.

for so doing?---And truly there is an ample subject for banter and ridicule in this report;---“ Such a person calls his family together twice every day to worship God, by whom he expects to be protected and blessed here, and hopes to be rewarded hereafter.”---If to do this is singularity, those that blame and deride it as such cannot be thought of without an equal degree of pity and contempt. If a man cannot be good, i. e. truly wise and happy without being singular, that is the world’s fault, and not his. And to encourage you to despise such obstacles, (as surely laughter and derision is but a slight persecution) let me put you in mind of our Redeemer’s almost dying words to his disciples, which were designed to support *them* and *as* under much greater trials; ---*In the world ye shall have tribulation ;*

S E R M O N III. 83

tion; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

It appears from what has been said, that the duty of family prayer should be performed twice in the day. Reason speaks the propriety of a morning and evening sacrifice. But if any one's situation in life or business, be really such that he cannot assemble any part of his family, even two or three, at both seasons, evening prayer at least should upon no account be neglected. For our beds may be considered as emblems of our graves, as sleep is of death. This is the time for imploring God's forgiveness of the offences of the day; his protection from the perils of the night; and the continuance of his blessings on the morrow.---But though, upon the whole, our evening oblation may be the more neces-

84 S E R M O N III.

fary duty, yet be it remembered that God maketh *the out-goings of the morning* as well as *evening to praise* him. The morning is indeed the properest time for our offerings of thanksgiving; and therefore let not any man wantonly or inconsiderately, and on frivolous and sought pretences, neglect the morning service: let him, if it be indeed impracticable, neglect it with reluctance; not regarding it as a task he has avoided, but as a comfort he has lost.

But what shall be done towards the discharge of this duty, by such as are at a loss what prayers to use; or by an household consisting only of two persons; or by a family of which the head is so illiterate as not to be able to read?---In the first case, the prayers used daily in the church are as well calculated for family-devotion,

S E R M O N III. 85

tion, as public worship ; and their own discretion, or that of a friend, will easily direct them to the choice of them ; or they may be supplied with proper forms of prayer out of printed books of devotion.---In the second case, if there be but two in a family, capable of joining in this service, even those two have Christ's promise that himself will make a third, and may accordingly be assured, that they shall *be accepted by the beloved*. And if these two be man and wife, there is plainly the greater reason for their offering up their joint petitions.---Three, we know, will make a Christian congregation even in the church.---In the third case, the use of a few short *collects*, more or less, as the memory shall be able to retain them ; or of two or three pious ejaculations, together with the Lord's prayer ; or,

86 S E R M O N III.

in certain circumstances, the use only of the Lord's prayer itself, shall, if the heart be sincere, be accepted as a reasonable service, and be effectual to all spiritual purposes.---The wisest are *not heard* for their *much*, but for their fervent and devout speaking.

And thus having fully set before you the duty of family-prayer, recommended it by a variety of considerations, and removed the few weak objections that may be formed against it, nothing remains but that I commend you to the guidance and direction of God's grace: expressing at the same time *my heart's desire* that, through the influence of that grace, you may know and feel his "service
" to be (in all its branches) perfect
" freedom."

S E R M O N I V .

Human life a state of vanity and
sorrow.

GEN. XLVII. Part of v. 9.

*Few and evil have the days of the years
of my life been.*

THIS was the sad account the patriarch *Jacob* gave to *Pharaoh* of the whole course of his own natural life : and, I apprehend, we shall find it too true a picture of human life in general. *Few*, says he, *have been the days of the years of my life* ; and, he adds, that those few

88 S E R M O N I V.

evil. That is, upon reflecting on his past life, he was not only obliged to declare of it in general, that it was rather uncomfortable than happy, but that he could scarcely recollect one day which had not enough of bitterness, or vanity in it, to denominate it evil. I said, the patriarch avers this of his *natural* life, because the assertion in the text, together with a considerable number of scriptural declarations to the same effect, must be understood consistently with those passages which so strongly express the felicity of the *spiritual* life, with regard as well to present feelings, as to future prospects. Religion, we know, will extract comfort from calamity itself. But in respect of the inconveniencies, vexations, and troubles incident to us as *strangers and pilgrims upon earth*, we shall all of us more or less confirm
the

the truth of what *Jacob* here affirms by our own experience. Agreeably hereunto it is observable, that the patriarch himself, in the foregoing part of the verse, calls *the days of the years of his life, the days of the years of his pilgrimage*. This being premised then, I propose from the words of the text,

First, to remind you of such passages of *Jacob's* life as will abundantly justify the melancholy account he here gives of it :

Secondly, to shew that this account is by no means peculiar to his case, but that human life in general falls under the same character : And,

Thirdly, to suggest to you some reflections which naturally arise from the consideration of this sad truth.

I begin

I begin then, first, to remind you of such passages in *Jacob's* life as will abundantly justify the melancholy account here given of it.---Indeed, if we look only upon the fair side of the great patriarch's history, which shews him in the distinguished light of the favourite of heaven, we may not be a little surprized to hear *him* uttering these *words of complaint*. If we reflect upon the many signal marks of kindness which God was pleased to bestow upon him, especially in that intercourse and familiarity with heaven which he was honoured with, and that divine providence which constantly gave him deliverance out of danger, and produced him prosperity and abundance out of hardship and affliction; but above all, if we consider the preference which he obtained even in his mother's womb over his elder brother, and the noble
privileges

privileges and consequences thereof, among which the most illustrious was the promise that the *Messiah* should spring from his loins; I say, if we suffer the splendor of these notable advantages to dazzle us, we shall hardly be able to see the propriety of the account he gives of himself to *Pharaoh*.---But not to insist, conformably to the remark just made, that these advantages were mostly of a spiritual nature, it will suffice to alledge that, if we give equal attention to all parts of his history, we shall not only acknowledge the justness of his declaration, but shall discover a remarkable instance of this truth, ---that God does not always intend worldly ease and prosperity as certain marks of his favour, but that, on the contrary, *whom the Lord loveth he frequently chasteneth*, and occasionally *scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*.

We

We will begin then with that important occurrence of this patriarch's life in which we find him by artifice drawing down upon his own head the blessing which his father *Isaac* intended for his elder brother *Esau*; and thereby entitling himself and his posterity to the pre-eminence designed them by the wisdom of divine providence. All this, it will be granted, was exceeding comfortable and glorious in prospect :---but what was the immediate consequence of this triumph over his unhappy brother? We read, in the next chapter, that, in order to avoid the resentment of this brother, he is under a necessity of becoming in a manner an exile; of stealing away privately from his father's house, and taking a long and solitary journey.---When arrived at the end of it, instead of the usage he might have expected from a near relation

lation, he is treacherously and unjustly dealt with; and no small portion of his life, the very flower and vigour of it, is wasted in a state of servitude. Upon his leaving at last this wretched state of dependance, and returning home, he is alarmed by the intelligence of his brother's coming to meet him with an armed force; and his apprehensions and anxieties for himself and family upon this account, may better be conceived than expressed. This terror of expectation is however providentially and happily succeeded by the complacency of reconciliation. But deliverance from present danger did not secure him from the attacks of future afflictions.---It was not long after, that his heart felt very uneasy sensations, when his sons *Simeon and Levi* troubled him, as he tells them, by their monstrous barbarity in the slaughter

94 S E R M O N I V.

slaughter of the *Schechemites*; and, as he significantly expresses it, made him to *sink among the inhabitants of the land*, wherein he was just settled.

---Sensations these, more painful than all his former ones, as they were occasioned by some of those who were nearest and dearest to him, and from whom doubtless he expected to derive comfort and support rather than infamy, reproach, or danger.

---Sensations, whose poignancy was felt by him even to the last period of his life, and provoked from his dying lips a curse, instead of a blessing, upon the authors of them; a curse, whose effects reached beyond themselves to their latest posterity. *Cursed be their anger, says the nearly expiring parent, for it was fierce, and their wrath for it was cruel; I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.*---If we add to this what he under-

S E R M O N IV. 99

underwent in reflecting on the most unnatural crime of his first-born, who *defiled* his father's *bed*; on the loss of his beloved wife; and the supposed tragical death of his favourite son, *Joseph*; we shall not, upon consideration of the whole, wonder at the account he gives of himself in the text;---*Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.*---I proceed therefore,

Secondly, to shew that this account is by no means peculiar to his case, but that human life in general falls under the same character; or, in other words, that this present state is a state of imperfection, vanity, and sorrow.

That this must be the case, plainly appears from the nature of those things which constitute worldly happiness,

96 S E R M O N I V.

piness, either as considered in themselves, or with relation to our desires of them. With regard to the latter, they fail in the main point, *viz.* that of giving satisfaction: for even when in the full possession of all our wishes, we find we have desired much more than we have obtained. And the consequence of this deficiency will be, that we shall not truly enjoy what we *have* by tormenting ourselves with the consideration of what we *have not*. We shall look upon our prosperity itself as a delusion, and be ready to conclude, that we have been hunting an idea, or grasping at a shade. And yet, notwithstanding all this we preposterously suffer our appetite for the *things of the world* to grow upon us, and are more eager the more we are disappointed.---With respect to the things themselves, on which we found our happiness,

happiness, their value is miserably sunk by two great inconveniences, the difficulty of obtaining them, and the uncertainty of keeping them. We are not rarely as much harrassed in the search of imaginary happiness, as we are baulked in the acquisition. How much toil and trouble does it often cost a man to procure that which at last appears not worth the purchase? In the mean time, while the whole bent of his affections has been turned upon this object, how many other enjoyments has he been utterly precluded from? how has he sacrificed his ease, his health, and perhaps his conscience, to ambition, to avarice, or probably to a transient pleasure, pursued with eagerness, but succeeded by loathings? And, after all, not to obtain in any degree what we thus ardently and painfully wish for, is matter of still greater uneasiness;

98 S E R M O N IV.

ness ; because we are not then convinced, as experience would convince us, that, with respect to all sublunary things, to be content to want is a greater happiness than to possess. -- But supposing we should be so happy as to obtain what we wish for most, at the expence of little or no time, or trouble, or inward peace ; or, even supposing farther, what is hardly to be supposed, that our highest expectations could be fully answered, and we could find as much satisfaction in enjoyment, as we had anxiety in pursuit ; who shall secure to us the continuance of these gratifications ? Can we call them our own, even when they seem to be most so ? Have we retained fortune in our favour, as I may say ; -- or are we in *league* with the changes and chances incident to mortality ? At best, the reflection, that the duration of our prosperity hangs

hangs on the slender thread of this life, at the same time that we are subject to a number of casualties and accidents which we see daily befall our neighbours, and may deprive us of it at once; so that we may be mournful survivors of our own happiness for many years, and at last *bring down our grey hairs with sorrow to the grave*; --- this reflection, I say, must necessarily throw a damp upon our spirits, even in the hour of meridian felicity. Nay, there is a certain nicety attending such a situation as this, which is in itself an uncomfortable circumstance. If we had all the world at command, as it were, we should repine at every little cross incident, and be afflicted by trifles. Our very humours would plague us, and we should suffer in the levity of capriciousness. In short, the least contrary blast is a storm to unhappy

100 S E R M O N IV.

sensibility, and our saddest calamities would be of our own creation. Wherein then consists the mighty difference between the state of Fortune's favourites, as they are called, and that of many who may be numbered among the sons and daughters of affliction, if what would appear an imaginary evil to the latter, is a real woe to the former, and they feel the more quickly the less they endure? Be this as it may, however, the probability, or the bare possibility of losing what our *soul loveth*, will be a continual ground of disquiet to us: and if so, how grievous must the anguish be, when distress actually comes upon us, and God *takes away the desire of our eyes with a stroke?*

What has been said in general on this head, may easily be applied to the particular case of the several
goods

SERMON IV. 101

goods of this life, which are the main constituents of worldly happiness and glory :-- so that it will be needless to enlarge upon the unsatisfactory and transient nature of health, strength, beauty, riches, and honour.

But it will be said, perhaps, the ties of affection are a more certain, as well as a more reasonable ground of comfort and delight, than the advantages already taken notice of. Are not family connexions, and virtuous confederacies, a most pleasing source of true complacency? Is not the tenderness inexpressibly delightful, which results from the relation subsisting between a man and his brother, the *son of his mother*; or *his son*, or *his daughter*; or the *wife of his bosom*; or his *friend, which is as his own soul*? --- This may be readily admitted; but still let it be remember-

ed, that in no state or situation whatever are we exempt from chances and contingencies; that the harshness of discord bears an exact proportion to the sweetness of harmony; that circumstances of confidence and security point distress, and aggravate mortification; and, in a word, that these soft bonds of union and intimacy, as they are by undutifulness or perfidy too often unloosed, so will they most assuredly be sooner or later torn asunder by final separation. ----

Just and delicate, by the way, are the sentiments of scripture, with regard to some of the connexions under consideration. --- *Children*, says the Psalmist, *and the fruit of the womb, are an heritage and gift that cometh of the Lord; like as the arrows in the hand of the giant, even so are the young children; i. e. a present ornament, and future defence to their parents.* --

But

But does not this very similitude intimate, that they may be an incumbrance and mortal wound, as well as a grace and a comfort? Thus it happens indisputably in the miserable *heritage* of bad children, and in the loss of good ones.--How pathetically does the same Psalmist complain of the treachery of a friend! --*It was not an open enemy that hath done me this dishonour; for then I could have borne it: but it was even thou, my companion, my guide, and mine own familiar friend: we took sweet counsel together, and walked in the house of God as friends.*--The complaint breaks off abruptly, because the shame and resentment of such unlooked-for and undeserved treatment is unutterable. In such instances as these, the capital injury is the deceit. Upon the whole, since the most substantial and valuable worldly blessings are manifestly precarious,

carious, and confessedly temporal; and at the utmost may rather be said to qualify calamity, than to produce happiness, human life in general, I apprehend, abundantly appears to be (what I have been endeavouring to prove it to be) a state of imperfection, vanity, and sorrow.

Nothing remains then but, in the third and last place, to suggest to you some reflections which naturally arise from the consideration of this sad truth. And,

First, if it be acknowledged that this world does not afford true satisfaction to the mind, it will unavoidably follow, that we should not make it's good things the chief and ultimate objects of our desires, but *set our affections on things above*. Before the gospel-light shone, men of a serious

rious and contemplative turn, perceiving how much sensual and earthly gratifications failed to procure happiness answerable to the longings and the capacities of a reasonable soul, were led to infer a probability at least of it's existing, after separation from the body, in another state more suitable to it's nature. But what was their wish and opinion only, is our firm belief, and sure expectation. --- Shall we then lie grovelling on the ground, as *men without hope*? When heaven is in effect opened to us, and offers real and everlasting happiness, shall we still pursue phantoms, and in a manner solicit disappointment? Let us consider this life in the same light in which holy *Jacob* did, as a state of *pilgrimage*; and this world as a place of passage, not of abode. *We have here no continuing city*, says the apostle; and what should follow, but that

that we ought to *seek one to come* ? If the gay visionary scenes we meet with in our way be apt to amuse and detain us, surely the many inconveniences, crosses, vexations and troubles we must encounter, should be sufficient to break the charm, to put us in mind of our journey's end, and provoke our desire, or rather our impatience, to arrive at it.

Secondly, as happiness is absolutely unattainable, to any considerable degree, in this state of mortality, we should not quarrel with our condition, or be discontented, because we do not find rest to our souls where it is not to be expected. And yet, unsatisfactory as this world is, we most of us love it too well ; nor are the common evils of life in general sufficient to wean our depraved appetites from their attachment to it. --- If
there-

therefore it pleases the great and gracious Father of the universe to make us drink deep of the cup of affliction, we should not only submit, but take it chearfully at his hand. For *whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.* The wholesome draught of sorrow is administered not only to cure the diseases, but also to preserve the health of our souls. Accordingly, God not only corrects his rebellious, but humbles likewise his most dutiful children. He knows the frailty of the best among us; he considers our infirmities, and is too merciful to trust us always with prosperity. We are in danger of growing remiss and indolent in a state of uninterrupted ease and security; and are often misled by the pride of self-love, to imagine *that* the reward, which is indeed but the *trial* of our virtue.

It

108 S E R M O N IV.

It was the confession of the *man after God's own heart*--*Before I was troubled I went wrong.* Let each of us under the same circumstances imitate both his piety and his ingenuousness; acknowledging God's goodness no less than our own sinfulness, and being perfectly sensible, that *of very faithfulness he causes us to be troubled.*

Thirdly, and lastly, if human life be at best unsatisfactory, never rising to happiness, and often *full of misery*; why should mortal man repine at it's shortness? It is absurd to own that all our days are *evil*, and at the same to complain that they are *few*. Such a complaint is little less than a contradiction to such a confession: for it is ridiculous to wish the continuance of *vanity and vexation of spirit*.--The consideration of the shortness of human life should, and, by divine grace

S E R M O N I V. 109

grace duly implored, would *so teach*
us to number our days that we may ap-
ply our hearts unto wisdom, even the
 wisdom of religion ; it would help to
renew a right spirit within us ; to give
 us a disrelish to sensual and sinful en-
 joyments, and something very like
 an indifference even to innocent gra-
 tifications : in a word, it would dis-
 pose us to prepare for our dissolution,
 and “ fix our hearts there only where
 “ true joys are to be found.” And
 under these blessed circumstances, we
 should continually offer up our sacri-
 fice of praise to God, who has in his
 infinite wisdom and goodness made
 this our pilgrimage so short, and fre-
 quently so very uncomfortable, lest
 we should think *it good for us to be*
here ; and thereby unqualify ourselves
 for those eternal and inconceivable
pleasures which are at his right hand
for evermore.

S E R M O N IV. 103

Grace duly inspired, would be made
 as to number our days that we may ex-
 ploy our hearts and wisdom, even the
 wisdom of religion; it would help to
 render a right spirit within us; to give
 us a disinterested to sensual and sinful en-
 joyments, and something very like
 an indifference even to innocent pre-
 tences; in a word, it would dis-
 pose us to prepare for our dissolution,
 and "fix our hearts there only while
 "true joys are to be found." And
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 tions of praise to God who has in his
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 this our pilgrimage so short, and in-
 quently so very uncomfortable; let
 us should think it good for us to be
 here; and thereby unprofitably enquire
 for those eternal and inconceivable
 pleasures which are at his right hand
 for evermore.

S E R M O N V.

The Nature and Privilege of Charity.

Preached for the benefit of a
charity-school.

I P E T. IV. 8.

*Above all things have fervent charity
among yourselves ; for charity shall
cover the multitude of sins.*

THE christian religion is essentially distinguished from all others, by that spirit of meekness, and gentleness, and love, which breathes through it, and which is it's
foun-

foundation, it's support, and it's end. It is remarkable, that whereas other religions have been planted and propagated by the violent arguments of fire and sword, christianity had the *arm of flesh* to contend with; had nothing to oppose to the prejudice, the hatred, and the malice of an idolatrous world, but patience and passiveness, made it's way by mere dint of it's own intrinsic purity and excellence; and at length, in the most literal sense, *overcame evil with good*. In truth, every human probability was against it; it *prevailed mightily* over all imaginable disadvantages and discouragements; it *grew* under oppression, and throve from persecutions. The church, that spiritual *building fitly framed together*, as St. Paul strongly expresses it, of which *Jesus Christ himself is the chief corner-stone*, may properly enough be
said

said to be cemented with the blood of "the noble army of martyrs." --- Such is the genius of Christianity; such was the constancy and resolution of it's primitive professors. And if it be asked, what were their inducements hereunto? we may answer, not only an intense zeal for the glory of God, the honour of their Master, and the cause of truth, together with their *respect to the recompense of their own reward*; but also their most ardent love of souls, their most affectionate concern for the spiritual interests of mankind, and, in a word, their *hearts desire* that all men, *both Jews and Gentiles, might be saved*. --- Let the writings of some of them be the vouchers of their charity. --- There we shall find this philanthropy, this divine love, in almost every sentence. Into what energy of thought, what vehemency of expres-

sion does it carry them ! Let any one read the Epistles of St. *Paul*, and be unmoved, if he can, with those exalted strains, those inflamed sentiments of benevolence with which they are animated. --- It would be endless to produce passages ; but one I cannot help transcribing. *I could wish*, says he, *that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen, according to the flesh.* --- Surely nothing can exceed such consummate disinterestedness as this, but the love of God himself. --- If we turn to the Epistles of the beloved disciple, St. *John*, we cannot but observe, that the main purport of them is to excite the spirit of *brotherly love* amongst those to whom they are addressed. And how does he do this ? Not by a cold, unaffecting argument ; not by dry and abstracted reasoning ; but by exhortations delivered , or rather poured,

poured, in the style of the warmest affection, and paternal tenderness. He conjures them as his *little children* (a more endearing appellation than that of merely his children) to *love one another*; he does not so properly enforce their duty in this respect, as invite them to it; and recommends it to their practice, not so much by it's propriety as it's amiableness. In short, his soul overflows in a manner with that Christian charity which probably entitled him to the honourable character, by which he is distinguished as the *disciple whom Jesus loved*, and gave him a place even in the bosom of his blessed Master.--But what if we refer to the precepts, and the example of that his and our blessed Master himself? What if we *look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith*, the friend of souls, the mediator between

116 S E R M O N V.

God and man, the *Saviour of the world*, who *in the days of his flesh* went about doing good both to the souls and bodies of men, and at length laid down his life for our sakes, herein commending his love towards us, in that while we were yet rebels and sinners he died for us? One would think the consideration of so great and glorious a cloud of saints and confessors, with the *Captain of our salvation* at their head, might be more than sufficient to warm the coldest, to rouse the most insensible, and to compel the most narrow-spirited to acts of Christian love and charity, from the mere principle of gratitude. Unhappily, however, this we know, in these last days has been very far from being the case; and accordingly, we frequently find the holy penman (as foreseeing this) inculcating the great duty of charity from personal motives, and

S E R M O N V. 117

and considerations of temporal and spiritual advantages or disadvantages proportionably attending the performance, or the neglect of it. They address to our passions even the meanest and least generous of them, not only encouraging our hopes, but also alarming our apprehensions. *St. Peter* does both in the words of the text, considered in their full latitude of construction. *Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves, for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.* In which words are contained an argument that comes home to ourselves, and to our dearest interests; and I shall therefore take occasion from them,

First, to expatiate a little upon the nature and excellence of charity :
And,

H 3

Secondly,

Secondly, to investigate the true import of the motive here offered to promote the practice of it.

In the first place then let us expatiate a little upon the nature and excellence of charity.---Now charity implies our constant and intense, or (to use the apostle's word) *fervent* concern for the happiness of our fellow-creatures, both as we are men, and as we are Christians; and consequently, an equal desire and endeavour to advance it on all occasions by all the means in our power. I say, both as men and as Christians, because charity is to be numbered not merely among the moral virtues, but the graces of religion too; otherwise, it may indeed be materially good, if I may so express myself, but will not be intrinsically, or imputably righteous. Charity may be said
to

to divide itself therefore into two great branches, *viz.* the love of God, and of our neighbour; or, rather, the latter is the blessed fruit and effect of the former. In other words, the love of God is the principle of all truly charitable actions; for as the immediate object of charity is the welfare of man, so its ultimate is God's glory.---In consulting the welfare of man, we shall, as true Christians, naturally and (I might say) necessarily regard him as a Being compounded of two constituent parts, body and soul; as a Being capable indeed in a certain degree of present, but principally designed for future and everlasting happiness. It is therefore manifest that charity chiefly consists in a lively concern for the souls of men, and for their welfare in a state of eternity. This is that *charity* which is the main *end of the*

commandment ; and by which the honour of God is most promoted. Charity then, we see, imports not only our doing good, but our doing good upon a proper principle. *Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, says St. Paul, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.* We may be humane, compassionate, generous, and liberal, without being charitable. We may build hospitals, and found colleges ; but unless our view herein be to the honour of God, and the spiritual as well as temporal welfare of man, we are only erecting monuments of our vanity and ostentation. Such acts as these are indeed the outward expressions of charity ; but *God is not mocked* ; appearances will not pass for realities with him who *trieth the hearts and reins*, and sees at one view the true motives to all our actions and undertakings.---And as it
is

is for want of this leading principle, viz. a hearty concern for the everlasting happiness of their fellow-creatures, or, the love of man for God's sake, that some may be said to throw away their charity with respect to themselves; so it is, principally at least, for want of the same, that others niggardly and unmercifully withhold it. When miserable objects of any kind present themselves to us, or are recommended to our notice, or commiseration, methinks it would hardly be possible for us to be unaffected by their distresses, did we properly recollect, that they have souls to be saved as well as we; that they are our brethren in a general sense by nature, and in a very particular one by grace; and that they are equally with ourselves related to the second *Adam* as well as the first; the *children of God, heirs of God, and joint heirs*

beirs with Christ. The due consideration of the level to which *high and low, rich and poor, one with another,* shall be reduced in an after-state is enough to annihilate in a manner, for a time, all present distinctions of birth, rank, and fortune; and to dispose the great and powerful to the meanest and most disgusting offices of good-nature, condescension, and charity. It is at least more than sufficient to check the insolence of human vanity, and possess the mind with benevolent and tender sensations. The prince that looks on a poor man with contemptuousness forgets that himself is but dust.---Such then ought to be the grounds of, and motives to our charity;---after deliberately weighing the importance of which, we cannot possibly be at a loss for objects. *As we have opportunity,* says the apostle, *let us do good unto*

unto all men ; especially unto them who are of the household of faith. In the full application of this divine rule we shall be led by our consciences, and by our judgments, to make distinctions, and to give preferences, suitably to the abundant variety of characters, situations, and circumstances, and the different connexions and relations which men bear to us. I shall not stay minutely to point out these. I shall rather adapt what I have farther to offer on this head to the occasion of our assembling together this day ; and must observe accordingly that, they who are *rich among us*, and by the blessing of Providence have it in their power to turn the stream of their bounty into more channels than one, will seldom have a more proper *opportunity of doing good* than the present.---The object of our benevolence is nothing less than the temporal
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ral and eternal welfare of poor children. And what can more deserve our care and charitable attention than the helpless state of infant poverty, and ignorance uninstructed? That the faculties of the human mind should be buried for ever in darkness, and souls lost before they are capable of exerting an effort for their own happiness, are circumstances horrible to him who has any feeling for his kind. *Herein indeed is love*, when we not only *lift up the hands that hang down and the feeble knees*, but (what is infinitely more necessary and beneficial) direct them to reach forward, as it were, to everlasting bliss; and enable the young *soldier of Jesus Christ* to beat down *Satan under his feet*;---when we feed the *hungry soul* with the *bread of life*, and clothe it with the enduring garment of purity and holiness, extending our kindness
to

S E R M O N V. 125

to the *least* of our *brethren* beyond this life, and providing for their future salvation. This is a *sacrifice* of charity with which *God* will be *well pleased*;---it is doing what in us lies, in a corrupt and licentious age, towards cultivating the *fruits* of righteousness, by nipping vice in the bud, and preventing ignorance from being the plea, and idleness the nurse of impiety.---And, *beside all this*, we are, in the case before us, bestowing our charity, by the divine blessing, even to present most happy effects. We are relieving the poor, and at the same time consulting the good of the community. Society itself is interested in this business, and we are, to the best of our power, providing posterity with useful citizens, and honest men. For want of proper education, a good disposition is insignificant, and a bad one incorrigible.

Indigence

Indigence unprincipled is a curse upon the public, and destruction to itself. But through the advantage of a Christian education, the poor themselves are enabled to be useful, and sometimes even ornamental members of that body, to which at best they would otherwise be a burden. In short, there is as much prudence as there is goodness in the constitution of charity-schools ; and they who are ready and active to promote them in their several stations, and according to their respective abilities, are actuated by the noblest principles that can fill the mind of man, *viz.* a sincere regard for the happiness of their fellow-creatures, and the love of their country.---Upon the whole, what has been often said of virtue in general, that it is "its own reward," may be particularly affirmed of charity. Acts of generosity and benevolence

volence upon Christian principles are accompanied with much self-satisfaction upon many obvious accounts; but upon none more than that of the privilege annexed to the practice of them in the text.---*Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves, for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.* I am accordingly led, in the

Second place, to investigate, as I proposed, the true import of the motive here offered for our encouragement.

The last words of this text may seem at first sight to convey a free pardon, and absolute indemnification, to the charitable man, so called, notwithstanding the number, or the size of his transgressions. For, says the psalmist, and the apostle after him, *Blessed is he whose sin is covered.* But those

those who understand the words in this sense have formed a wrong notion as well of charity as of sin in the passage before us. What has been advanced in the preceding part of the present discourse is a direct confutation of such a notion. He who is charitable upon principle; he who loves God, and his brother for God's sake; he who does not only acts of kindness, but *whatsoever he does, to the glory of God*, will not, generally speaking, be chargeable with enormities; and consequently the sins for which *his* charity will provide him a covering, are not sins of presumption, but of inadvertence, omission, or infirmity.---Indeed the very term --- *multitude* --- corresponds best to this interpretation. And how does it cover even these sins?---We must take care not to attribute too much even to the purest charity itself; which

which, after all, qualifies us for mercy only in, and through the merits and intercession of our blessed Redeemer. The best of human performances have nothing meritorious in them for very evident reasons. Properly speaking, *Jesus Christ, the righteous, is the propitiation for our sins*: although to be entitled to the benefits of that propitiation is a circumstance replete with divine comfort to a well-disposed Christian.--- Charity, we see then, as it does not imply personal merit, so neither can it supersede our general repentance for our *secret faults*, or, as we usually call them, infirmities. I say, general repentance; because, to borrow the words of the psalmist, *no man can tell how oft he offendeth*. But all this while, *Charity shall cover this multitude of sins* by rendring such repentance effectual through Christ to

everlasting salvation. In short, charity, in a Christian sense, is the handmaid, or attendant of true piety, but neither is, nor can be its substitute. A truth, which highly deserves to be recommended to the most serious attention of the present generation. This may be called an age of bounty even to profuseness. We hear every day in a manner of foundations of all kinds ; liberal subscriptions ; ample contributions ; and occasional collections for almost every imaginable purpose of charity.---But the question will be, whether this exuberance of generosity is not understood by self-flattery to be a covering not merely of our negligencies and ignorances, but of the *multitude* of our crying sins and transgressions ; or, in other words, an atonement for the extreme licentiousness of the times ; ---the folly, the vice, the irreligion
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so unhappily prevailing among us. ---It is to be hoped, however, enough has been said to confute so extravagant a notion, and to caution the careless and unthinking against a delusion so fatal in its consequences; and I shall therefore conclude with a few words of exhortation to those upon whose account I have at least very willingly undertaken the province of this day.

Let it then be your endeavour, my good children, to make yourselves perfectly sensible of the comforts of your situation, and your very great obligations to those whose charity has rescued you from misery, and from danger, and, it may be, from “destruction too both of body and soul.” This life is no farther a blessing than as it is a necessary passage to a life to come; to those who

are *trained up in the way they should go*, and take care *not to depart from it*, it is the road to unspeakable felicity; while of the undisciplined, the idle, and the disorderly part of mankind, it may, it is to be feared, with too much truth be said, that *better had it been for these men, if they had never been born*. However, admitting it to be a question, how far allowances may be made by infinite goodness for gross ignorance and stupidity, the advantages of education are undeniably certain and clear. These are generously and charitably put into *your* hands; and therefore there will be no shadow of excuse for *you*, either in the sight of God or man, if you forfeit, by your own voluntary act, the manifold and glorious privileges conveyed to you. But, I hope and trust you are under the influence of proper principles, and have formed
suitable

suitable resolutions ; that you have a due sense of your own interests, and a grateful veneration for your benefactors ; and that you will accordingly be disposed, by the divine grace, to do your duties at present, and, in consequence thereof, in that future state of life “ to which it shall please “ God to call you.” You will hereby well express your *thankfulness* for the benefits you have received by *deserving* them ; and repay your benefactors by your services to God, and usefulness to the community. You will hereby most effectually encourage, and *provoke unto love and to good works* of charity, others hereafter, upon such occasions as the present, by comfortably convincing them in *your* good lives and behaviour, that the *labour of love* bestowed upon *you* was *not in vain*. And finally, at the great day of universal account, when men

of all ranks and denominations shall be assembled *before the judgment seat of Christ*, you will be amply rewarded for the good use and improvement you shall have made of the present advantages and blessings you enjoy ; while the charity and benevolence of those by whom you have been supported, shall have *great recompense of reward* from him, who has graciously assured us, that he will consider every act of kindness and love *done to the least of these his brethren*, as done to himself.

S E R M O N VI.

On insincerity in devotion.

P S A L M LXVI. 16.

If I incline unto wickedness with mine heart, the Lord will not bear me.

TH E R E is no occasion to introduce the subject contained in these words with any prefatory observations. The reasonableness and duty of prayer, and the necessity of performing it with sincerity, must be equally evident, from a due consideration both of the divine nature and

136 S E R M O N VI.

our own. And yet nothing is more common in the world than the scandalous neglect of this duty, or the unworthy discharge of it. The admonition implied in the text directs me to the latter branch of complaint, and will give me an opportunity to point out, in the

First place, The several kinds and degrees of insincerity, whereby our prayers become an abomination, instead of an acceptable sacrifice : and,

2dly, To shew that allowance will be made by a merciful God for human infirmities, and the defects of real piety.

The discussion of which heads will lead me to a short application in conclusion.

I am

S E R M O N VI. 137

I am, in the first place, to point out the several kinds and degrees of insincerity, whereby our prayers become an abomination, instead of an acceptable sacrifice.

Now the first or highest degree of insincerity is a designed hypocrisy, practised with a direct view to deceive others, by the appearance of an extraordinary devotion, in order to the advancement of our present interest or reputation. This however is of a nature so odious, that it will be needless to expatiate upon it. The very mention of it is sufficient to excite universal detestation. --- It is indeed to be wished, by the way, that such detestation were not so frequently apparent in an unhappy addiction to the opposite and no less impious extreme. --- If a certain period of the last century was infamously

ly characterised by the grimace of false sanctity, the present has but too much distinguished itself by open and avowed irreligion.

But I pass on to the next degree of insincerity, or *inclination of the heart unto wickedness*, as the text expresses it, which is that of those who, in the midst of their pretended devotion, have their *affections fixed on things on earth*; and, at bottom, are not desirous of parting with their follies and corruptions, but fearful of suffering for them. --- What motives have some men to their prayers (if it be not a profanation to call their mock addresses by that solemn name) but the dread of divine justice, or the sense of almighty power? These are the only attributes of the Deity that are objects of their religious attention: for of his goodness they have
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no proper notion ; his purity and holiness they love no more than they imitate ; and his laws, if they are observed at all by them, are observed with great reluctance, as arbitrary injunctions of a tyrant, rather than salutary precepts, or ordinances of paternal love, calculated for their own perfection and happiness. They seem to flatter themselves with an imagination, that the name of Christians, and a mere personal attendance at the house of prayer, may be regarded as sufficient substitutes of spiritual holiness ; and, under the deception of such a notion, not only *incline unto wickedness with their hearts* in the very hour of devotion, but even meditate and contrive it ; thus, at one and the same time, most absurdly and presumptuously worshipping their Maker in appearance, but in reality setting him at defiance. --- And farther

ther, such nominal Christians as these have even temporal motives for an external piety, which suppose no love of virtue, or abhorrence of vice; such as the apprehension of subjecting themselves to legal censures, or of losing the esteem and favour of friends and patrons; or, again, concern for reputation, which is sometimes necessary even for the worst of purposes. --- And, to consider this matter in another light, impairment of health, ruin of circumstances, and the inquietudes and anxieties more or less inseparable from a vicious course of life, will at certain intervals, and on particular occasions, be reasons with many for regretting the violence of their own passions and appetites. Since they cannot be vicious without great inconvenience, they begin almost to wish they had been, or could be virtuous. But, all this while, is
there

S E R M O N VI. 141

there not lurking at their heart a quarrel with the God of nature for having ordered things thus? Is there not this impious expostulation brooding *there* --- why this inconstitence between peace and sensuality? pleasure and happiness? Why this troublesome connexion between interest and reputation? In short, could we search and examine the real sentiments of such persons, we should see in them a disinclination to purity, and a fond attachment to corruption. The lamentable fact is, that many could very well reconcile themselves to moral evil, were it not attended with natural. Doubtless if some disagreeable consequences, both here and hereafter, could be removed, pleasure would be the idol too commonly avowed, and vice so much the object of attachment, that men would

not

142 S E R M O N VI.

not so much as even seem to pray against it.

Next to this kind of insincerity, and somewhat a-kin to it, is that of praying for the Christian graces, without an intention of applying the means necessary to their attainment. Many are desirous enough of being good, as far as speculation goes; *i. e.* they would be so without trouble, and enjoy the victory without the warfare. If they could be *new creatures*, in the literal sense, or without any concurrence of their own; if God would vouchsafe to be sole agent in this business, and by extirpating temptation supersede the necessity of resistance: in other words, if the great work of righteousness could be wrought *in* them, instead of *by* them; upon these terms, they could be content; they would even be glad to be virtuous.

virtuous.---But as to *cutting off right hands*, and *plucking out right eyes*, as to spiritual severities of abstinence and self-denial, all these are far from their thoughts; though they formally pray for those virtues which, in a greater or less degree, suppose and imply them.--Nay, the less rigorous, injunctions of religion, the ordinary precepts of the gospel, are considered by these indolent Christians as burdens too heavy to be borne. *Go, wash and be clean* --- is thought an *hard saying*. They expect the *prophet's hand to be laid on them*, as we may say, to be *healed* of their spiritual maladies by a word's speaking; or, (if they must seem to do something) by the tedious recital of their own lifeless petitions; as if there was a kind of charm in religious formalities, in certain empty sounds which they call prayers, to amend the heart which is altogether

144 S E R M O N VI.

altogether unconcerned in them ; and to procure that pardon and grace which their cold manner of asking shews they have no earnest desire of obtaining.

Another degree of insincerity by which our prayers are rendered unacceptable, consists in our making exception for some particular vice, or constitutional failing ; I mean a practical exception, or our constant indulgence of some bad habit, without consideration, or rather with wilful inconsideration, that we do evil : the inventing apologies and extenuations ; or, in a manner, pleading a privilege for ourselves, and a right of exemption from obligations by which we acknowledge others to be bound. --- The tenor of our language and expostulation on such occasions is ---
The Lord pardon his servant in this one thing

thing --- is it not a little one? &c. ---

But who sees not the absurdity of supposing that these reserves in favour of a darling and bosom-vice are consistent with sincerity? The circumstance of agreeableness is a demonstration of that corruption of heart, which every true penitent will think himself more especially bound not to gratify, but to correct; and he will therefore wish, as well as pray not to be excused *in it*, but to be delivered *from it*.

A fifth kind of insincerity hath its ground in pride and self-conceit. Some are apt to consider themselves not only as better than others, but also better than they are in themselves; and as advanced much farther in virtue and holiness than they really are. This kind of hypocrisy is a self-deception, arising from the weakness, as

the grossest of all does from the malignity of the heart. And if it indeed falls short of the abominableness of that highest degree of insincery which is hateful to God and man, it is however quite opposite to that frame of mind, which is requisite to recommend our devotions to the divine acceptance. If it does not, like that, aim to make God himself the abettor of our villainies, it provides a covering for our impurities: it supposes our failings *swallowed up* (if I may so speak) in our perfections, and presumptuously ranks us in the number of those *that need no repentance*.-- Now under a persuasion of this sort, we shall never arrive at a state of sanctification; because *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble*. In his sight, our utmost worth consists in the acknowledgment of unworthiness. In one word, a disposition

position so full of self-idolatry can never pass for piety with him; and whoever *thinks highly* of his progress in virtue and holiness, cannot give a plainer proof that he has little or none at all.

But this arrogance, this overweening opinion of ourselves, is always accompanied with a spirit of uncharitableness, which must likewise be put to the account of our insincerity in devotion. Want of candour towards others will ever follow the imagination of our own excellence. Every proud *Pharisee* looks upon his neighbour as a *Publican*. This spiritual pride, and insolence of contempt, does not indeed constitute uncharitableness; but it is a principal branch of it, and falls under the same predicament with envy, hatred, and malice, and such other odious

148 S E R M O N VI.

qualities as incapacitate us for divine mercy, and turn our most solemn services into *vain oblations*. --- The forgiveness of others is an established condition of our own forgiveness ; a condition proposed, not in the strictness of equity, but with the condescension of grace ; a condition so wonderfully indulgent, so infinitely tender to human weakness, that it will not be easy to say, whether our corruption or our folly would be the greater, in declining the acceptance of it.

Another, and the last instance of insincerity I shall mention is that of praying with lukewarmness ; or, in other words, without a due sensibility of our particular spiritual situation, or, in general, of our fallen and lost estate.---It is but too common for men to plead those infirmities as excuses

cuses, which they ought to bewail as obstructions, and endeavour to amend as faults. And what is this but indirectly at least to ask and expect a licence for sin? But is it not ridiculous to imagine, that mere verbal confessions, and approaches *ore tenus* only, as we may say, to the throne of grace, shall be the means of procuring the pardon, or dispensation in question? This is not to be penitent, but presuming; not to desire to be absolved from our offences, but indulged in them. In short, such a notion as this absolutely precludes all that attention and fervour of devotion, which a proper sense of our insufficiency tends directly to suggest, cherish, and promote.--- And again---the negligence and hypocrisy of our devotions hath another ground in our insensibility of our fallen state; of the necessity of a Re-

deemer to expiate, to justify, to intercede, to recommend, and effectuate our petitions; and of the infinite love of *God, manifested in the flesh*, for the accomplishment of these gracious purposes. A lively apprehension of these great and affecting truths is necessary to produce those dispositions which are required in prayer; such as humility mixed with confidence, neither of which can be expressed without proportionable earnestness, and fervency.---Humility that is not founded in a deep sense of our fallen and helpless state by nature, is a false and inadequate humility; and all confidence in God's mercy which does not rest upon the belief of a Redeemer's merits, is wretchedly weak and precarious.---The want of this faith in our Saviour's merits was an unavoidable defect in the prayers of virtuous heathens; but in Christi-
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ans it is a gross failure in point of sincerity; as they profess to ground their hope of acceptance purely upon the expiatory sacrifice, the obedience, and mediation of the blessed Jesus. We can scarce say a prayer without expressly avowing this profession. But is it a mere ceremony to offer up our petitions in the name, and through the merits of Jesus Christ? Shall not our hearts be affected with a sense of those merits? Till they are so, our services will be only the dead semblance of devotion, without its true animating spirit; and the doubtful prayer of an heathen, deploring his unenlightened, unassisted state, is, in effect, much more Christian, because much more sincere.

These are the several kinds and degrees of insincerity in devotion, whether public or private; and is

there he among the sons of corruption that can say, he hath not in the least *inclined unto wickedness with his heart*, under any one of the foregoing articles? Rather, *who can tell how oft he offendeth*, more or less, with respect to some one or other of these particulars? Who hath so *thoroughly washed his hands in innocency*, as to be *cleansed* from the inherited stains, the original infection of our nature?--- The question therefore will be, how far, or under what circumstances, our failings will become venial; which question will be resolved by briefly shewing, as I proposed,

Secondly, that allowance will be made by a merciful God for human infirmities, and the defects of real piety.

If

S E R M O N VI. 153

If an heart altogether pure from sinful inclination were the only sacrifice God would accept, it hath already been acknowledged there is none among the *sons of men* that could offer it. Indeed, in this case, a principal branch of our worship or devotion, required by God as a proof of our sincerity, and consisting in an humble sense and confession of a sinful nature, and actual transgression, would be absolutely superseded. There are therefore degrees of sincerity answerable to our progress and proficiency in holiness; and all these are accepted for the sake, and through the mediation of our Redeemer. The prayers even of unregenerate persons, *i. e.* sinners, will not be rejected as such: prayer being required as one of the means of regeneration, or of acquiring holiness and purity.---Enthusiasts indeed will talk in a different

154 S E R M O N VI.

ferent strain, but with enthusiasts I do not concern myself at present; resting satisfied that those I am speaking to will admit what I have said, and shall say, to be *words of truth and soberness*.---The case is,---in the infancy of repentance, (if I may call it so) men must pray for *better inclinations*; and that prayer itself, if sincere, will be one proof of a *good inclination*. The intention of a penitent may be real, though weak; he may truly bewail his inability to exert an effectual resolution; and that sorrow is a step towards such resolution. Even the most imperfect desires of a spiritual life, when proceeding from the heart, are acceptable to the divine goodness; for the *bruised reed shall not be broken, nor the smoking flax quenched*.

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In short, let a man judge of his sincerity by the ends proposed in his devotions; which should be his own purification, the welfare of his fellow-creatures, and the glory of God. If he finds, and feels these principles at his heart in any degree, he is sincere, notwithstanding he may not be so fervent as he ought. But then such sincerity will not suffer him to acquiesce in this want of fervor; it will manifest itself by a true concern, by an anxious desire and an earnest endeavour to advance in goodness, and as the apostle emphatically speaks, *grow in grace*. And these sentiments will most undoubtedly render him a fit object of divine compassion, and consequently of divine assistance.

To conclude then---since without devotion there is no commerce or correspondence with the Creator, and
therefore

therefore no happiness for a rational creature, and since sincerity is the very soul of it, of what vast importance is it to cleanse our hearts as much as possible from every kind and degree of hypocrisy? And of what consequence must it be to us to make a proper use of the frequent opportunities of worship which we enjoy? For let it be remembred, that a total neglect of these opportunities, or an abuse of them by irreverence, inattention, &c. will probably lead from iniquity to infidelity, or at least harden us in practical ungodliness.

Lastly, as the good Christian will be sincere, so will he be of course regular and constant in his devotions, even to punctuality. Possibly indeed such strictness may expose him to the ridicule of inconsiderate witlings, or profane scoffers. But surely that
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S E R M O N VI. 157

man will discover no more spirit, no more fortitude than sincerity, who is deterred or discouraged by the idle raillery of *fools that make a mock at sin*. A wise man will not be stopped in his spiritual course by such impediments; but will only be careful to take away occasion of offence from those who seek occasion, by that discretion, which governs zeal, and tempers resolution. The piety of this man will be steady and rational; neither timid, nor ostentatious; sober, but not lukewarm; serious, but not precise; fervent, without enthusiasm; and regular, without formality. ---Thus happily circumstanced in his spiritual affairs, and not wilfully *inclining unto* any sort or degree of *wickedness with his heart*, he is comfortably assured, that the *Lord will be gracious unto him*; or, as the psalmist

158 SERMON VI.

psalmist expresses himself, in the
verse immediately following the text,
*will hear him, and consider the voice
of his prayer.*

S E R M O N VII.

The case of Naaman considered.

2 KINGS V. 18, 19.

In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself down in the house of Rimmon; when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.

And he said unto him, go, in peace.

THIS passage (which concludes the well-known history of Naaman the Syrian) as now read,
and

and as it runs in the version in use, has been supposed to contain much difficulty, and to lie open to profane cavils, and reflections affecting not only the sacred character of the prophet Elisha, but even the honour of God himself.---Which consideration has been matter of dissatisfaction to many pious and learned men, who have accordingly been induced to adopt another construction of the original, perhaps warrantable enough, but, as it should seem, by no means necessary.---For if we consider the passage itself and the several particulars of the context, this new interpretation will (I think) appear rather forced and unnatural, and, if so, to be an unserviceable as well as needless substitution.

Let us then, in the first place, consider the passage according to the common

common interpretation, and see whether such interpretation is not the most obvious and natural :

And, secondly, enquire whether it may not be sufficiently vindicated from the objections which it has been supposed liable to.

Let us then, in the first place, consider the passage according to the common interpretation, and see whether such interpretation is not the most obvious and natural :

After the despised waters of *Jordan* had by the divine blessing proved miraculously salutary to the illustrious Syrian, the history proceeds to inform us in what manner he expressed his gratitude to the prophet, who had enjoined the use of them for the cure of his leprosy ; and to the Al-

VOL. II.

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mighty Power, which had effected it, in the following relation.

V. 15. *And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; and came, and stood before him; and he said, Behold now I know there is no God in all the earth but in Israel: now therefore I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. (16.) But he said, as the Lord liveth before whom I stand, I will receive none: and he urged him to take it, but he refused. (17.) And Naaman said, shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord. (18.) In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon*

S E R M O N VII. 163

Rimmon; when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing. (19.) And he said unto him go in peace.---Now if the whole of this passage be considered, and especially the connexion of the latter part, viz. the Syrian's declaration, that he will *henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord,* with what follows, *In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant,* that is, in his occasional and bodily adoration in the house of Rimmon; when all this is considered I say, what is more natural or consistent than to understand him as making a single exception, and requesting an indulgence for such apparent conformity to the religion of his country? May we not reasonably suppose such a request to have been founded in his complaisance to his royal master, or, more

164 S E R M O N VII.

probably, in his fear of offending him? He professes that his real and personal devotion shall invariably be paid to the *God of Israel*; but humbly hopes and prays, that his observance of an outward ceremony, in consequence of his attendance on his sovereign in a civil capacity, might meet with favourable allowance at the hand of that God, and not be regarded by him as a mark of wilful hypocrisy, or criminal prevarication. ---This however is the sense which most naturally offers itself, and will still recur, after all the objections that can be made.

But it is not so natural to suppose, according to the other interpretation, that Naaman is in these words expressing a remorse for his past idolatry. For that interpretation runs in the time past---thus.---*In this thing the*

S E R M O N VII. 165

the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master went into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaned on my hand, and I bowed myself in the house of Rimmon; when I bowed down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.---

I say, even supposing the Hebrew text to be equally capable of this construction (which may perhaps admit of some dispute) is it natural to consider the noble Syrian's language upon this occasion as the language of contrition? Let the words of the text be interpreted as referring to his future conduct in a particular instance, and they are at first sight perfectly easy and admissible; but they are surely rather puerile and jejune under the idea of a formal recantation. In short, it does not seem very reconcilable to probability, that Naaman intending to supplicate the par-

don of his past idolatry, should confine his confession of it merely to this instance, his ceremonious worship *in the house of Rimmon*; where he was obliged by his office to attend his master, and outwardly at least could not in prudence, or decency, but deport himself as he did. Was *this* then the substance of his religion? Was *this* the only instance of his devotion to the gods of his country? Was not *this* indeed rather the most venial, and, if I may so call it, the most unreal act of his idolatry? And what tolerable reason can be assigned for his singling *this* out for the subject of his penitence and deprecation, and omitting the more personal and voluntary acts of his false worship, his repeated sacrifices and burnt offerings? It is evident he lays the chief stress upon these, when he promises for the future not

to

S E R M O N VII. [167

to perform this undoubtedly more important and essential part of worship *unto other gods, but unto the Lord*; making, as it should seem, a plain distinction between *it*, and the circumstance of external adoration which he solicits indulgence for.

Neither is it perhaps reasonable, altogether to disregard the perfect agreement of all the ancient versions of the Hebrew text, in the interpretation of the passage before us; since, supposing the grammatical structure of the words indifferent to either sense, this concurrence sufficiently evidences the judgment of the several interpreters, and what appeared to them most natural and agreeable to truth.---Nor is the citation of the passage from the eighth chapter of this book, in order to invalidate the force of this concurrence (I mean the

prophet's answer to Benhadad's enquiry about his illness) by any means adequate to the purpose; not only because it is much more probable that many interpreters should mistake in one instance than in more; but also because, notwithstanding the great plausibility of the corrected version of that place, it may be much questioned, upon due consideration of it, whether the supposed erroneous may not really be the true reading, and the result of judgment rather than misconception.

But to return to the passage before us: the objections to that explication of it, which we have been defending as most obvious and natural, are drawn chiefly from the reply which Elisha makes to the noble Syrian's petition: *And he said unto him, Go in peace*; which is by some construed as
his

his approbation of the other's idolatry, and condemned as inconsistent with his sacred character: how justly, we are now come to consider in the

Second place, wherein it was proposed to examine, whether the common interpretation may not be sufficiently vindicated from the objections to which it has been supposed liable.

Now, whereas it is objected, that the petition was such as could not consistently be made by Naaman himself, because it was for a dispensation for idolatry, nor, for the same reason, be granted by the prophet; let it be re-considered what was the idolatry for which this indulgence was requested; and also enquired how far such idolatry was, properly speaking, approved by the prophet's
answer

170 SERMON VII.

answer, -- *Go in peace.* Or let it be supposed for a moment, that it was true and criminal idolatry which Naaman desired a dispensation for; even upon this supposition, I say, it is far from being clear that the prophet's reply is to be interpreted as an absolute approbation of his conduct. For in this case, it may reasonably be understood to mean no more than a civil dismissal, and general good wish at parting, without implying any thing like a direct approbation of a sinful prevarication in him. If Naaman's request was considered by Elisha as evidencing all want of principle, and abominable in the eyes of God, he was then unworthy of better instruction, and justly suffered, by an undecisive answer, to follow the corrupt bent of his own imagination. And that the form of speech made use of by the prophet, upon this occasion,

caſion, might import no more than a common valediction, deſigned perhaps to put an end to the converſation, is not to be doubted, unleſs a more ſolemn intention and application of it could be aſcertained from the circumſtances; which is the point in diſpute. It is well known, that in our own, and other modern languages, phraſes, full as ſolemn in their literal ſenſe, as this Hebrew one of *Go in peace*-- are uſed conſtantly in a ſlight, common way of civility, and without any particular meaning or ſentiment answerable to their real import.---But ſtill the queſtion may recur --Was not this kind of diſmiſſion, at this time, by implication, an encouragement to idolatry? --- And in answer, let it be conſidered, that as to *Naaman* in particular, it was immaterial, if he was unworthy of further light, as was hinted above; and

172 S E R M O N VII.

and so it was with regard to his countrymen the *Syrians*, that accompanied him ; unless the conversion of that nation had been designed by Providence, and by means of the preaching of *Naaman*. And as to the *Jews*, could any danger to their principles be apprehended from this answer, it had been easy for the prophet to obviate every thing of this sort by a proper and subsequent explanation.

But it may be fairly presumed, as we have seen, that the idolatry which *Naaman* petitions to be indulged in seeming to perform, was not of so heinous a nature. There may be well conceived, and more suitably to his case and circumstances, some medium between the spirit of a confessor and martyr, into which his confession of the true God and conversion, have, without sufficient ground
from

S E R M O N VII. 173

from scripture or probability, been interpreted, and that gross and sinful prevarication, with which his request has been charged. Must he needs be either a perfect convert, a prophet, and *a teacher of righteousness*, or else a rank hypocrite and idolater? And is there any occasion to cavil at Elisha's wishing him well, and bidding him--*Go in peace*, after a request, which may justly be thought to imply much more of infirmity than presumption? Is there any necessity in this case to interpret, or even any propriety in interpreting the prophet's farewell into an approbation of idolatry, properly so called? Besides, there is great reason to apprehend that such Idolatry as that, for which a dispensation is here supposed to have been humbly requested, was generally practised and allowed among the imperfect converts (if I may so term them) or

“ pro-

“profelytes of the gate,” (as they were called) who were not obliged by the strict letter of the second commandment, as the *Jews themselves* were; but were left at liberty occasionally to pay respect to the gods of their own country, by an external and apparent ceremony of adoration. For it is the exprefs judgment of many of the Jewish doctors, that the outward or bodily worship of an idol was permitted to these profelytes under certain circumstances. Nay I do not see how it could be in general avoided, or that there could in fact be such profelytes resident in their native countries upon other terms than of such apparent conformity. Because though at most times, and in most parts, there was very great latitude allowed to the introduction and worship of foreign and neighbouring deities, yet was this liberty never to be

S E R M O N VII. 175

be understood as warranting any man to disturb, and much less to supersede the national religion. --- And it was upon this ground, as seems highly probable, that Naaman made, what, considering his circumstances, one might venture to call his humble and modest petition; as being persuaded, that if he might be indulged in *this thing*, i. e. in his bodily and seeming adoration of the idol in the *house of Rimmon*, all would be well; he should not be compelled to incur the penalties of death, or banishment, or confiscation, or even of loss of rank and preferment: but that such external conformity would be satisfactory, and sufficient to prevent, or to obviate the effect of, any narrow and particular enquiry into his more conscientious and personal devotions. Upon this footing then, is there any room to reproach the Syrian general
with

176 S E R M O N VII.

with gross hypocrisy, and downright prevarication ? --- But on the other hand, so deep a compunction and contrition, as is supposed by the modern interpretation of his petition, seems (as before observed) very unnatural, and could not be expected from human infirmity, except such extraordinary grace and illumination, and such a spirit of zeal be imagined in Naaman, as most probably would have been recorded, with it's effects, of which however there is no trace to be found in history, sacred or profane. And upon this representation of the matter, which, for what appears to the contrary, may be a just one, the prophet's conduct also is totally clear of censure in dismissing his petitioner with *Go in peace* ; even if that valedictory form be considered as equivalent to an indulgence or permission ; which is the
most

most that can be reasonably made of it, as it falls very short of a full and entire approbation. Many things were allowed or permitted to the Jews themselves, under their imperfect oeconomy, which were not therefore approved, but were to be corrected by a more excellent dispensation; and with regard to the Gentile world in general (left to the light of nature and conscience, which they had sadly obscured and abused) it is said that *the times of this ignorance God winked at.*

Upon the whole, I think it appears that the common interpretation of the passage is very defensible, and, on various suppositions, sufficiently clear from all reasonable objections. If the request of Namaan was altogether criminal, and by no means the object of favour and indulgence, there

178 S E R M O N VII.

is no necessity to interpret the prophet's reply as permissive of it: and on the other hand, if it was allowable in his circumstances and situation, as seems highly probable, the prophet might well bid him *go in peace*, as consenting to a venial act, but not therefore approving a wicked or directly idolatrous one.

Not that I would be understood to design the utter disparagement or confutation of the other interpretation, which has been adopted by the zeal of men of great learning and piety. My principal aim has been only to vindicate the common one, which seems the most natural and probable, from the objections to which it has been deemed liable, and of which infidels have been ever forward to avail themselves. It seems unreasonable and imprudent to humour

S E R M O N VII. 179

most persons of this cast, who will be apt to take advantage from an unnecessary concession; and whose cavils at this passage of sacred history are founded upon the wider bottom of their general opposition to revelation. Rather let the injustice and weakness of their conclusions, even from their own premises, be shewn; *i. e.* from the common interpretation of this passage. --- But they may be acquainted at the same time, that even those premises, though apparently most probable, may possibly be wrong, as it cannot be demonstrated that the other interpretation (which at once oversets all their objections) is false.

But to conclude, by way of inference from the usual explication of this passage of scripture. --- Let us leave unreasonable and sceptical men

to enjoy their mock triumphs, their groundless and unimportant objections; and let them, or others, who may be so disposed, form from thence such pretences as they may, at this time, for their insincerity in religion. And, instead of being so studious to vindicate the Hebrew prophet, and magnify the Syrian general into *one*, as some have done, who thought it necessary to have recourse to a new interpretation, let us judge it more to our purpose to make a proper use of the consideration of his human infirmity, (the strongest light perhaps in which his conduct can be seen) by comparing with it the many flagrant instances of our own spiritual idolatries, and vain endeavours to reconcile the *real* devotion we pay to ourself-love, passions and vices, with the hypocritical service of our Maker.---Let us deeply reflect how apt we

S E R M O N VII. 181

we are to make exceptions, and crave indulgence for the *real* (I say) and cordial service of some particular favourite sin ; praying, in the impious language of a corrupt heart --- *Lord, pardon me in this thing ;* -- and farther exhortulating --- *Is is not a little one ?* *i.e.* in comparison of our own virtues, and the vices of others ; both which are seen through a magnifying glass. Let us beware, lest, even without applying for a dispensation to others, we speak *peace* to ourselves, when *there is no peace* ; and let it be our constant and fervent prayer, that

“ we may have grace to judge of
 “ ourselves, as God judgeth of us ;
 “ and may never be at peace with
 “ ourselves, till we are at perfect
 “ peace with him ; and by purity of
 “ heart and godly sincerity, be qua-
 “ lified to see and enjoy him in his
 “ heavenly kingdom, through Jesus
 “ Christ our Lord.” To whom, &c.

S E R M O N VIII.

IN TWO PARTS.

PART I.

On religious conversation.

E P H E S. IV. 29.

*Let no corrupt communication proceed
out of your mouth, but that which
is good to the use of edifying, that it
may minister grace unto the hearers.*

ALTHOUGH immodest discourse, which is by the apostle elsewhere stiled, Filthy Communication, may seem more especi-

ally to deserve the title of Corrupt; yet there is no manner of reason why we should restrain the force of this prohibition within so narrow a compass. We may very justly extend it to the whole circle of those excesses of the tongue, whereby we offend, either against religion and piety, by blasphemy and profaneness;--against charity, by slander and evil speaking; -- against truth, by lying and falsehood;--against meekness, by clamour and bitterness;--against humility, by contemptuousness and insolence; --- and, lastly, against christian gravity and seriousness, by levity, and that jesting, which is not convenient. All which, as they are by St. Paul severally and distinctly forbidden in different places, so are they here well summed up by him in the phrase of corrupt communication: and, agreeably to this latitude of construction,

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S E R M O N VIII. 185

the general command, in the latter part of the text, will be answerable to a general prohibition in the former. “ Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”

As to the first part, the prohibition, or negative precept, it is very observable how full and emphatical the scriptures are upon this head of the government of the tongue. St. James appropriates a considerable part of his General Epistle to this subject, and lays so great stress upon it, that he makes it the characteristic to distinguish the truly religious man from the hypocrite. “ If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s
“ re-

186 S E R M O N VIII.

“ religion is vain.” And again, ---
 “ If any man offend not in word, the
 “ same is a perfect man, and able al-
 “ so to bridle the whole body.” And,
 to obviate the common excuse which
 men are apt to make for their fail-
 ings in this respect, namely, that they
 are slips of the tongue, rather than
 deliberate and premeditated transgres-
 sions, our blessed Saviour pronounces,
 that every idle word (by which we
 must at least understand every word
 offending in any of the above points)
 that men shall speak, they shall give
 account thereof in the day of judg-
 ment : “ For, says he, by thy words
 “ thou shalt be justified, and by thy
 “ words thou shalt be condemned.”
 And it needs not seem strange, that
 the offences of the tongue should be
 so severely censured, as they are
 throughout the holy scripture, or so
 solemnly threatned even with a fu-
 ture

S E R M O N VIII. 187

ture account, as they are in the passage last cited, when it is considered,

First, that they are a notorious abuse of speech, that most excellent and comfortable endowment of human nature, which distinguishes us from the brute creation, no less than reason itself, with which noble faculty it hath indeed so close a connexion, that the one necessarily implies the other. Now to employ this useful and important talent in the utterance of such things as right reason cannot but condemn, is to prostitute it to purposes widely different from those it was designed to serve. All other conveniences and comforts of speech are but secondary, and very inferior considerations, compared with the benefits derivable from it in our communications respecting the honour of God, and our edification of one another.

other. It is upon these accounts that the tongue deserves the high character bestowed upon it by holy David, of "the best member that we have." -- And accordingly the son of Sirach resolves very justly, as well as piously; "The Lord hath given me a tongue, and I will praise him therewith." And in truth, the absurdity, as well as the wickedness of abusing the faculty under consideration, is set forth in very strong terms by the apostle just now cited. "The tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison: therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we man, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place

S E R M O N VIII. 189

“ place sweet water and bitter ? Can
“ the fig-tree, my brethren, bear
“ olive-berries ? either a vine figs ?”

And, by parity of reason, the argument contained in these questions may be applied to all and every instance of verbal transgression, whether against God, or against our neighbour. --- Shall the same mouth be the vehicle of thanksgiving and blasphemy, of prayer and irreverence, of truth and falsehood, of courteousness and contumely, of candour and detraction, of simplicity and prevarication ?

And, let it be considered, secondly, how inconsistent all corrupt communication is with that purity of heart which the gospel so indispensably requires, with that “ holiness
“ without which no man shall see the
“ Lord.” For impure conversation
is

190 S E R M O N VIII.

is a sure token, or rather the natural produce of an impure mind. And therefore our blessed Saviour argues, with regard to mens' imaginations, and discourses correspondent to them, "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by his fruit." --- And afterwards he asks a questions which, in the manner of asking, imports an utter impossibility; "How can ye, being evil, speak good things?" And further, to determine this impossibility, he then declares positively, "A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things."

Thirdly, another reason why the faults of the tongue are so frequently
and

S E R M O N VIII. 191

and strictly forbidden, is the great proneness of men in general, in a greater or less degree, to fall into them, however into most of them. -- The fact is, that on this very score, because they are so easily, and often inconsiderately committed, we are inclined to look upon them, at most, as very pardonable transgressions, and such as are atoned for by the transient censure which we pass upon them in ourselves, either upon the spot, or upon recollection. Indeed our very forgetfulness is considered as an argument of their light and trivial nature. This then being the case, it becomes highly necessary that these offences should be represented in proper colours, and as liable to suitable penalties; that such considerations counteracting, as it were, our natural propensities, we may at least so far *take heed to our ways*, as not notoriously

riously or flagrantly to *sin with our tongues.*

But further, another reason still why we are so strictly enjoined to let no "corrupt communication proceed out of our mouth," and that which at present I shall chiefly insist upon, is the fatal consequence of it, with regard to it's infectious nature, and malignant tendency, to propagate vice among mankind, and to destroy even the appearance of virtue. On account of this extensive and pernicious quality, a corrupt tongue is by St. James compared to a fire; nay further, to a fire so diffusive, that it "setteth on fire the course of nature," and is as spreading and destructive in the moral world, as a general conflagration would be in the natural. --- Which description, strong as it is, is but too just: for it may safely be averred,

S E R M O N VIII. 193

averred, that the general corruption of the world is more owing to irreligious conversation, than to any other cause whatsoever. It is apparent from experience, that “evil communications principally corrupt good manners.” They are more infectious than even bad examples: because by them a man, particularly a young one, is gradually, and as it were imperceptibly debauched; he is persuaded and fallaciously reasoned into the commission of actions, to which he had not been seduced before by any intrinsic influence, or the weight of the most engaging authorities. Loose conversation is a kind of medium between corrupt communication and actual wickedness. It is too great an essay for the young novice at once to leap over all the fences of virtue, and plunge himself into the depths of iniquity. This

VOL. II.

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appears

appears to him too barefaced, and frightful to be closed with, till he has been trained up in the school of vice, to open his eyes wide to the pleasures of sin, and at the same time to shut them to the deformities and dangers of it; till he has been taught by his profligate instructors, to pursue that, under the notion of gallantry, or spirit, or constitutional indulgence, which he could not so well reconcile himself to under the idea of enormity; till he has learned to look upon his fears as childish, and his modesty as unbecoming; and is at length prevailed on, by such good words and fair speeches, as deceive the hearts of the simple, to set out an adventurer in the world of pleasure, under the blessed auspices of men of unblushing foreheads, and hardened hearts.---The case is (to speak more fully to a matter of this consequence) when

when a man falls first into bad company, he is soon entertained with avowals of those depraved and vicious inclinations, which he has before, to his concern, found in himself. The discourse which he hears emboldens him to throw in his mite, as I may say, and express somewhat of those natural propensities, which he likewise feels : and this is a great point gained on the side of Vice, and lost on that of Virtue. For those vicious inclinations acquire more strength by utterance ; and the wish which we are not ashamed to own, we shall not long be afraid to gratify. In this situation, our young man is thoroughly and fatally prepared for the influence of example ; for the influence of the example of those persons, whose mirth and wit, and good sense, and fine taste, and it may be learning, he has so long admired and

196 S E R M O N VIII.

loved : and how shall he now resist the desire of realizing those impure imaginations, which have been raised by the luxuriance of their descriptions ? How shall he withstand their friendly invitations to partake with them in their debaucheries ? or how shall he stand out against their rail-lery and contempt if he refuse ? He is now reduced to an alternative which will not much perplex him, either to forsake the company which he hath found so entertaining and delightful, or to run with them into the same excess of riot, to which he has but too natural a bias within him.

Such are the unhappy effects of corrupt communication. But the mischief stops not here : -- these successes of old sinners with the young and unexperienced, encourage, confirm,
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and harden themselves in sensuality. Every profelyte to the cause of vice is a fresh proof, another instance of the frailty of human nature,--the favourite topic, the standing plea, the perpetual refuge, or rather the subterfuge, of profligate libertines, and, if I may so call them, veteran debauchees. These think they have less reason to be surprised or concerned at their own sliding so easily into the path of sinners, when they perceive others, more innocent than they can ever remember themselves to have been, so weak, so utterly unable to resist it's attraction. Thus wicked men strengthen themselves in wickedness, and become quite shameless by looking round with pleasure upon the numerous circle of people like themselves. So much company keeps them in countenance, gives them new spirits ; they are infinitely pleased to see

198 S E R M O N VIII.

the majority on their side, while each particular sinner seems to delude himself with a hope that he shall escape among the croud which surrounds him.

But my subject leads me to mention another set of men, upon this occasion, who, though by no means abandoned either in principle, or practice, yet, one should think, are very willing to be thought so; who, by a strange kind of affectation, *appear* much worse than they really *are*, and who, for their brethren and companions sakes, as we may say, or for the increase of merriment, or with a view to pass for persons acquainted with the ways of the world, will join in all levity, and too often even ribaldry of conversation. In short, they are so desirous of pleasing in general, and of being caressed even by them, whose

whose principles and manners they condemn, that they dress themselves out in that shew of gaiety, which alone will entitle them to a place among such company. They throw off all the aukward and uncouth air and mien of religion, as libertines call it, and may properly enough be said to be hypocrites reversed. They invert, as it were, the intention of that precept, which commands us to “set a watch upon our mouths, and “keep the door of our lips,” and bestow the care requisite to prevent whatever is idle and vicious from escaping from them, in studiously avoiding to advance any thing that is serious or virtuous. Thus they act a double part, desiring to be regarded by God as persons of a good principle at bottom, and yet be thought men of gallantry and spirit by those with whom they converse. But let

200 S E R M O N VIII.

them seriously reflect upon the mean as well as sinful prevarication they are herein guilty of. Let them not flatter themselves, that the censure which probably they pass in private upon their company, and themselves too, will atone for their conduct in public. Let them rather consider how deeply they have incurred the divine displeasure by their base compliances, and a conformity which bespeaks them at best but lukewarm Christians; a character highly odious to a God, who is every where in holy scripture represented as jealous of his honour. Besides, they have great reason to be apprehensive that the consequence of this conduct may be their becoming at length as loose and debauched, both in sentiment and practice, as those very persons whose vices they have had the meanness to pay court to, by affecting such discourse

course as was agreeable to them. In the most favourable point of view; however, they resemble the madman of Solomon, who scatters about fire-brands, arrows, and death, and says, "Am I not in sport?" But supposing no such effect in their own lives, they ought to reflect, and deeply too, that they are promoters of corruption and impurity; that they really, though not deliberately or designedly, advance the cause of the grand enemy of mankind; and that the foolish talking, the vain, the light conversation, in which they take a part, may produce and cherish worse dispositions in others, than they proceed from in themselves.

It is a dreadful thing to be partakers of other mens' sins; and this should seriously be considered, as well by those persons whom I have just
now

now described, as by all who indulge themselves in corrupt communications. Most other sins may be committed with private and single guilt only; but this, in it's own nature, implies participation; and no man can tell what share of the general corruption he may have to answer for, added to his own personal sins, arising from the influence of his irreligious and immoral conversation. --- And with this consideration, I will close the negative part of the apostle's precept, -- "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth." -- But this is not all that is required of us. It is not sufficient that we barely abstain from such discourse as tends directly to corrupt ourselves and others; but we must likewise accustom ourselves to "that which is good to the use of edifying,"

S E R M O N VIII. 203

“ ing, that it may minister grace un-
“ to the hearers ;” --- which is the
positive precept or duty enjoined in
the text, and will afford a subject for
distinct consideration.

...that it was a matter of grace and
...which is the
...enjoyed in
...and will attend a subject for
...consideration.

SERMON IX.

PART II.

On religious conversation.

EPHES. IV. 29.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

HAVING already spoken to the first part of the text, which forbids the vice of corrupt communication, and shewn the reasons why it is so strictly forbidden, as 1st.—Because it is a gross abuse of the gift of speech.

speech.---2dly.---Because it is so inconsistent with that purity of heart which the gospel requires.---3dly.---Because men are so apt to be guilty of it, in some instance or other, through inadvertency and heedlessness.---And lastly.---Because of its bad influence, and malignant tendency to propagate vice and immorality.

I am come now to the second part, or duty enjoined in the text, which is to accustom ourselves to that conversation, which “is good to the use” of edifying, that it may minister “grace unto the hearers.”

The ground of this injunction appears plainly from what has been already observed concerning the very bad effects of the contrary sort of conversation : for if this is both so
general

S E R M O N IX. 207

general in the world, and conduces so much to the wickedness of it, it becomes highly necessary that it should be opposed by good and religious discourse: thus we have an antidote to counterwork the prevailing poison: and we owe this to the honour, and glory of God, which we ought to promote every way, as we cannot any way more naturally or effectually, than by publicly professing our reverence for his holy name and laws, by openly shewing uneasiness at the violation of them in other men, and by taking all proper occasions of instructing the ignorant, confirming the weak, cautioning the inadvertent, and rebuking the profane. Our good actions will not be sufficient for the purposes of edification without good conversation: both are necessarily implied in the whole notion of a religious man's conduct,

conduct, and must be taken together to form an exemplary character. Let a man act in publick ever so well, his sincerity will be called in question, his private life suspected, and bad motives for his actions supposed, unless his conversation be uniform with his behaviour. If a man pretends to be a complete gentleman, or a polite scholar, or an adept in any branch of science, we expect to find specimens of these several characters in his discourse; and, in like manner, we look upon it as one proof of a religious man, that he converse religiously.

But further, as zeal for God's honour will dispose men to religious conversation, so does charity to our neighbour especially require that such
 "communications should proceed
 "out of our mouths as may minister
 "grace

“ grace unto the hearers ;” such as may tend to awaken them out of their stupidity, to correct their errors, reclaim them from their sinful habits, and, in short, to save their souls from death. The holy psalmist was full of this spirit of philanthropy, when he exclaimed so affectionately ; “ It grieveth me when I see the transgressors, because they keep not thy law.” And, in another place he strongly expresses the deep concern which he felt, by the manner in which it vented itself, “ Mine eyes gush out with water because men keep not thy law.” In like manner every true Christian must feel in a greater or less degree these humane emotions upon observing the greater part of mankind walking in the ways of darkness and destruction, not only with an air of security, but even of gaiety and triumph. In short, a good

man will never think it too much trouble to stretch forth his hand if possible to save some: or rather, can he forbear exerting his utmost strength, I had almost said going beyond it, in the glorious attempt? Warmed with a divine love for the souls of men, he will gladly embrace, nay, studiously make, and contrive opportunities of promoting their eternal welfare. With this disposition he will overlook all difficulties, and discouragements, and do his best to reform by his godly conversation, and wholesome advice, even those who may insult or deride him for his pains. He will not be afraid of affronting, or being affronted by the man, whose recovery he desires much more than his thanks; and although his patient be neither sensible of his kindness, nor of his own danger, he will not fail even to force the
spiritual

S E R M O N IX. 211

spiritual remedy upon him, however nauseous it may seem to the receiver, or with what trouble soever to the giver, the administration of it may be attended. To do this with all circumstances and particularities of attention, is indeed the more especial office of private and personal friendship; which is a mode of edification, though manifestly comprized in, yet not immediately intended by, the apostolical precept before us. However, as well with regard to this, as that which consists in the prudence, the decency, the seriousness, and the piety of our public and general conversation, (the communication to which the text directly refers) we cannot but observe, that a good man's discourse will naturally be to the purpose and use of edifying. For "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Whatever a

212 S E R M O N IX.

man's mind is full of, will be apt to overflow, as it were, in his language, almost without his thought: and when the law of God is in the heart of the righteous, and possesses it entire, his "mouth also will be exercised in wisdom, and his tongue will be talking of judgment." Now a man of this turn will, generally speaking, consort with those like himself, rejoicing in their company, edifying, and being edified by them, while all together will be like the good men, whose manner the prophet Malachi thus describes, (after having first given us the stout words of the wicked, as he expresses it) "Then they that feared the Lord, spake often to one another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and thought upon his

“ his name.” In which remarkable passage we have not only this godly custom of the righteous represented, but also the Almighty’s particular attention to it, so as to command his holy angels to take notes of their conversations, and register their names by the glorious, and distinguishing title of those that feared the Lord.

But although the good man will not “ keep company,” as an associate, “ with any brother who is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner,” in obedience to the admonition of our apostle ; though he will naturally chuse the company of men like himself, that he may with the more freedom and pleasure enjoy such conversation, as is agreeable to him, yet will he not decline the society of the most abandoned sinners

from any mean principle of cowardice, or false shame; or if, by this occasional fellowship, he hath the most distant prospect of answering any purpose of edification. He who goes *out* of the world of the wicked, will do no good *in* it. Indeed the injunction in the text, as well as what hath already been observed from it, necessarily supposes promiscuous communication; and accordingly, though in some cases, and for prudential reasons a man may “keep his
“mouth, as it were, with a bridle,
“while the ungodly is in his sight,
“though he will keep silence, yea
“even from good words,” yet this will rarely happen.---In general such constraint will be “pain and grief
“to him; his heart will be hot
“within him,” till at length the fire of religion will be kindled in it, and the flames of zeal, and charity, burst
out

out in generous vindications of God's honour, and affectionate reproofs of mens wickedness. And he will enjoy the comfortable reward of this boldness in that self-approving consciousness, which will enable him to appeal to Almighty God in the words of holy David, " I have declared thy
 " righteousness in the great congre-
 " gation : lo, I will not refrain my
 " lips, O Lord, and that thou know-
 " est. I have not hid thy righteous-
 " ness within my heart : my talk
 " hath been of thy truth, and of thy
 " salvation."

And indeed (to pursue this argument) it is our bounden duty in all companies whatsoever to shew, what manner of persons we are, by the tenor of our conversation. Let those then, who are well-wishers to religion, openly declare on its side, en-

O 4 couraging

216 S E R M O N IX.

couraging the friends thereof, and confounding its enemies, by shewing that the number of the good and virtuous is not altogether so inconsiderable as people imagine. The silence of well-meaning men in a great measure gives up the cause which they ought to maintain. By not explicitly protesting, as I may say, against vice and immorality, they indirectly and consequentially support it. For this silence will be interpreted by sinners of all degrees in their own favour, and considered as at least a partial approbation of their proceedings. Nay they will be ready even to deduct these tender-mouthed Christians (if I may take the liberty to call them so) from the small number of their opponents, and to reckon them among their friends. Indeed, if men sincerely believe, and seriously reflect upon the important truths

truths of the gospel, they will easily overcome all little worldly prejudices against religious conversation. They will despise the imputation of singularity, or hypocrisy, or the shame of being out of that fashion, of which every good man ought to be ashamed. They will take the advice of the wise son of Sirach, and learn to distinguish between the "shame which bringeth sin, and the shame which is glory and grace." They will not refrain to speak, when there is occasion to do good, and will not "hide their wisdom in her beauty:" That is, they will convince the world that virtue is not beloved only because it is not known, nor its graces sufficiently discovered;---that religion is the most noble subject for eloquence, and is capable of displaying, as well as employing the finest parts;---that there is nothing at all unpolite in it, that

that it should be confined to pulpits, churches, and closets, but that it may safely go abroad into the world, even into courts and palaces, without any fear of discredit, justifying the holy psalmist's pious resolution; "I will speak of thy testimonies even before kings, and will not be ashamed."---We have in truth an inexhaustible fund, not barely of instructive, but elegant, not only of edifying, but entertaining discourse, in the wonderful works of creation, in the extraordinary and daily dispensations of providence; and indeed in the ordinary occurrences of human life. We may speak of the glory of God's kingdom without preciseness, and talk of his power without formality, and so possibly become winners of souls even in our social capacities. By this sort of communication we shall minister grace unto our hearers, without

S E R M O N IX. 219

without seeming to design it, and at once give happy proof of our understanding, and our piety, our politeness, and our discretion. There is indeed nothing in religion but what is lovely, amiable, and of good report; it being the distinction and ornament of human nature, though it is sometimes exposed, it must be confessed, to the scoffs of libertines and infidels, by the imprudence of its professors. And as this ill management of the best cause in the world often does it a prejudice, and gives a pretence to the profane to slight and disregard it; it may not be amiss to lay down a caution or two, directing to the manner of conducting our religious conversation, that it may be “good and to the use of edifying.”

The first that I shall mention, and what the last considerations more immediately

mediately suggest, is, that we should carefully avoid all appearance of moroseness, stiffness, and needless austerity, and even study to deliver our sentiments not with haughtiness, but modesty; not with dogmatism, but deference; not with magisterialness, but affability. It is the first character of a good companion, in every sense of the expression, to converse with freedom and ease; nor will he be like to make proselytes to virtue among them of his acquaintance, his friends, or his neighbours, who seems to be above them, or out of humour with them. If conversion be our aim, a decent cheerfulness will do much more towards it, than a supercilious gravity. We should not be too scrupulous about trifles, lest we appear rather peevish, and quarrelsome, than religious and charitable: and in short, if we have
a mind

S E R M O N IX. 221

a mind to make other men like ourselves, we must appear as like other men, as innocence and virtue will permit.

Secondly, seasonable opportunities must be picked out to introduce conversation of a religious turn. Proper regard must be paid to time, place, and persons. For religious discourse may be ill timed, misplaced, and misapplied as well as any thing else. And the misfortune is, a failure of discretion, in any of these respects, will not only frustrate our present intention, but often disappoint a second attempt. Because a prejudice is immediately taken against the person so failing, and whatever he says afterwards, let it be never so good, or proper, will serve only to remind us of his former trespass against good manners, or good sense.

It

It would be highly absurd to begin preaching at a feast, or any time of diversion, or entertainment. For, not to observe that the persons, then applied to, are not in the proper disposition to receive benefit from religious applications, they will argue that, as such relaxations of nature are plainly allowed, and religious conversation is unsuitable to them, the man who joins them together, must have a very weak head, or a melancholy mind, and so will consider him as very ill qualified to be a censor or instructor.---So far indeed must be observed that innocent conversation, at least, is always a duty. Here the negative part of the text takes place. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth." And, it is no less a duty in a religious man, as he must be offended at such discourse, to shew his dislike of it, and
reprove

reprove it at times of mirth, as well as any other: and he will not justly forfeit the character either of polite or prudent for taking such commendable liberties.

After all, discourse, of a religious and moral tendency, is far from being wholly inconsistent with the freedom of recreation, and the sprightliness of festivity. A man of address will often find opportunity of “pre-
“ring Jerusalem, even in his mirth.” Many vices of the present age may be termed follies in a temporal sense; nor would wit and ridicule be at a loss for subjects, though men were regarded only in the light of animal beings. Accordingly religious purposes may really, though indirectly be served by convenient jestings; and raillery as well as remonstrance be applied to the “use of edifying.”

Our

Our apostle may reasonably be supposed to have had such conversation in view, when he directs us to let our "speech be always with grace, "seasoned with salt:" And with regard to the effects that may be produced by a jocular, but judicious hint, or a facetious, but well-adapted reproof, in the hour of social joy and gladness, we may pertinently ask the question put by the wise man,--- "A word spoken in due season, "how good is it?" In short vice may in many instances be made a thing laughable, as well as virtue; and to make some amends for the general great abuse of the excellent talent of speech, it is necessary sometimes, that the same wit and humour should be employed towards the reformation of the wicked, which is too often miserably prostituted in corrupting the virtuous.

The

The third and last caution, I shall mention, relates to the manner or stile of our religious discourse.

And this should be as like our common conversation, as the nature of the subject will allow. Whatever is introduced in familiar discourse, should be expressed in familiar language. But the scripture phrase and diction is not such; and therefore should be rather avoided than studiously made use of. For, though the doctrines contained therein, may and ought to enter into our ordinary talk, yet is there no occasion to transplant into it the particular forms of expression wherein they are delivered. This would be very uncouth, and unnatural; texts of scripture being but ill-suited to common modes of speech, and so making a motley figure in conversation: besides to quote the

226 S E R M O N IX.

holy oracles of God in the very form delivered by the inspired writers is little better than a profanation, or, at least an indecent use of them. And, another reason still against this practice, is the suspicion of hypocrisy, to which it is liable, and that not without ground from the affected purity of the mock saints of the last century (though the present is not barren of similar instances) who were as notorious for having the word of God in their mouths, as for wanting the influence of it in their hearts, and daily violating the plainest dictates of it in their lives. So that this sort of pedantry in religion, or cant (as it was called in reference to the tone of voice wherewith these people uttered their sentences of scripture) became the almost unquestioned mark and brand of a knave. There is very strong reason therefore,

S E R M O N IX. 227

therefore, to avoid a custom, in itself ridiculous, if not irreverent, and also made so odious by example.

And now I shall beg leave to make two short inferences from what has been said, and so conclude.

The first is, that if such communication, as may minister grace unto the hearers, is a duty incumbent upon every Christian, then must it still more strongly oblige those persons, whose stations, characters, and professions give a particular weight, and authority to their discourses; making their good, or bad influence, more extensive, more edifying, or more destructive. In this light stand all, whom either nature, or their own choice, hath placed in a state of superiority and direction over others. In this relation are parents to their

P 2

children,

228 S E R M O N IX.

children, house-holders to their servants, masters to their scholars, governors and magistrates to their subjects, and ministers of God's word to all those over whom the Holy Ghost hath appointed them overseers. It would be well if all these, and especially the last, would seriously reflect what an influence their conversation must have, one way or another, and the heavy guilt that will lie upon them, if it points ever so little the wrong way.

Secondly, if it will not be sufficient to attend to the negative clause of the text, and to take care that our discourse be innocent, and as clear, as may be, from the faults that are so frequent in the general and daily course of conversation (to which purpose we cannot too earnestly implore the almighty to “set a watch
“ before

“before our mouths, and to keep
 “the doors of our lips;”) but we
 are likewise required by the positive
 branch of the apostle’s precept to let
 “such communication proceed out
 “of our mouth,” as is useful, in-
 structive, and edifying, as well as
 harmless, incorrupt, or amusing;
 how readily should we embrace all
 occasions of introducing, seconding,
 and discussing subjects of a moral
 cast, and religious tendency? If we
 duly consider the beauty of religion
 itself, and our own interest in con-
 forming to its rules, we shall not
 surely be ready and eloquent upon
 any subject that relates to this world,
 and yet cold, and indifferent, when
 religious topics are started. We
 should employ our faculties in the
 service of God, and esteem it the
 greatest wisdom to “have under-

P 3 “stand-

“ standing in the ways of godliness,
“ and virtue.

And, lastly, let us consider that, if it be our duty to converse like good men, it must be no less so to think and live like them. For the effect implies the cause; and religious communication is the natural effect of religious thoughts and actions: so that it would be a contradiction, and a mere farce, both with regard to ourselves, and others, to talk like Christians, and live like reprobates. ---Let us, therefore, faithfully look into our hearts, and do our utmost, with the divine assistance, to purify and cleanse those sources of all our words, as well as works.

And, may God give us all grace conscientiously to consider, and imprint on our minds, what a weight
and

S E R M O N IX. 231

and compass of duty is contained in that other passage of the apostle of so near affinity to my text.---“ Let
“ your conversation be as becometh
“ the gospel of Christ.” And likewise, in that of St. Peter.---“ As
“ He which hath called you is holy,
“ so be ye holy in all manner of
“ conversation.”

S E R M O N X.

On religious resolution.

P S A L. CXIX. 106.

I have sworn, and am stedfastly purposed to keep thy righteous judgments.

TH E S E words strongly express that settled disposition of mind, which was natural to the author of them ; and which every one should endeavour to confirm in himself, that would be like him ; that is, virtuous and holy. Our practice cannot be sincere

sincere or uniform, till our hearts be thus piously fixed ; which they will never be by loose sentiments, chance convictions, or transient resolutions. We must work ourselves into a serious purpose, a godly determination to assert and maintain the dominion of our reason over our affections ; the effect of which will be the actual and constant observance of the laws of God, without any wilful or gross deviation from them. Whatever falls short of this, can never be answerable to the notion of a religious life. All short of this is only to confess that we ought to be, or to wish that we were, what we are not. And what is this but trifling with God, and deceiving ourselves ? He is the true Christian, who hath *inclined his heart to keep God's statutes always, even unto the end* ; and can say justly, in the words of the text, *I have sworn,*
and

S E R M O N X. 235

and am stedfastly purposed to keep thy righteous judgments. --- From which words I shall take occasion,

First, briefly to consider the nature and necessity of godly resolution.

Secondly, I shall point out some of the chief causes or pretences of irresolution ; at the same time observing how insufficient they are to justify it.

Thirdly, I shall lay down a few general directions for our proceeding in consequence of a godly resolution.

First, I am briefly to consider the nature and necessity of godly resolution.

Now by resolution in general we understand a settled disposition and habit

236 S E R M O N X.

habit of mind that will produce a constant and regular course of action, in conformity to those principles and motives which first engaged us in such, or such a mode of proceedings. We do not call that man a man of resolution, who designs ever so well or so warmly, but him only who acts as he resolves; who carries himself with an uniform spirit of steadiness through the general course of his life, and particularly exerts the same on those occasions which require it.

It would be very strange then, if religion did not call upon us for that firm temper of mind, and consistency of practice, the want of which is a great inconvenience and disgrace to us in the conduct of our worldly concerns. Indeed it does so strongly call upon us for it, that what is expedient and prudent in the one case,
is

is absolutely necessary as well as expedient in the other: and that it must be so, will plainly appear from the first reflection upon the objects of religious resolution, and the motives engaging us thereto. The objects in general of this kind of resolution are, the government of our passions, our performance of duties very distasteful to our depraved nature, and our abstinence from gratifications much too agreeable to it. Now this is a task attended with so many, and such continual difficulties, that to go through with it, will evidently require a much greater share of constancy and resolution than needs be bestowed upon any wordly thing whatsoever. --- And if we consider, in the next place, the motives engaging us to this resolution, we shall find that we cannot drop, or decline it, as we may in temporal matters.

matters. With regard to these, we may often think it more eligible to submit to some shame, or to sustain some loss, than to be at the trouble of preventing either. But the consequences of acting resolutely or otherwise in our spiritual affairs, are of such importance as will bear no comparison ; and to neglect *them*, even on account of the greatest difficulties imaginable, is not indolence, but infatuation ; not folly, but madness. -- It must therefore amaze us to observe so many instances of resolution formed with an eye to worldly gain, or present applause ; so many difficulties undertaken, so many dangers encountered, for the sake of a transient, and perhaps an ideal good ; while in the business of religion, which sets eternal happiness before our hopes, and eternal misery before our fears, we are, in a manner, cold,
inactive,

S E R M O N X. 239

inactive, insensible. Men profess to believe the things of religion, and to allow the necessity of acting accordingly; and yet most preposterously, and in despite of their own convictions, apply that vigilance and industry, that constancy and zeal, which are so highly requisite to the work of salvation, to things which, comparatively speaking, are of insignificant value, and momentary continuance.

What are the chief grounds of this fatal absurdity of practice, I proposed to enquire under my second head; and am now to point out, accordingly, some of the principal causes or pretences of irresolution; observing at the same time how insufficient they are to justify it.

The first, and indeed, in a general view, the entire cause of the want

*pledge & bind them-
selves to
act accordingly*

want of resolution in religion, is the corruption of our nature. This is most plain and obvious, as being felt experimentally, in a greater or less degree, by every man. --- There is no person (those at least excepted who are utterly abandoned, and stupefied by sinful habits) who does not perceive in his understanding a consciousness of a certain rule of virtue, or morality, together with a conviction that his actions ought to be conformable to this rule; and at the same time feel in himself a strong bias of inclination towards such actions as are manifest transgressions of it. And he cannot reconcile these contradictions in his own mind without inferring from them, that our present state was not our original constitution; but that as long as *that* continued in it's perfection, duty and disposition looked the same way, and
nature

nature itself not only directed, but led to the practice of virtue. Now it seems reasonable that this sense of man's original state should excite in us a laudable ambition to recover it as much as may be, and induce us to take pains to be virtuous. The fact is,--our carnal appetites, we must be sensible, were not designed to be the governing part of our nature. --- Reason therefore being not so blind but it discovers their usurpation, and it's own proper superiority, is disposed to shake off the yoke. But our endeavours for this purpose are generally precluded by a pretended persuasion that they would be ineffectual. Such a persuasion must, I say, be pretended, because impossible; unless it be the effect of a sincere trial, and long and certain experience; and that such a persuasion cannot be the consequence of such experiment,

riment, is abundantly evident. For, I believe, it may safely be affirmed, that no man ever set about the great work of subduing his passions earnestly, and directed his life according to the principles of reason sincerely, and persisted in such a conduct resolutely, without perceiving a considerable alteration in himself for the better. And that some men have made great progress in morality, and attained to very high degrees of self-government by dint of discipline and resolution, a few illustrious examples even in the heathen world sufficiently convince us. These instances are enough to prove the possibility of correcting the depravity of nature ; and they reflect at the same time great scandal and shame upon Christians, who wilfully continue slaves to it, though they enjoy much stronger motives and encouragements to undertake

dertake a reformation ; namely, the assurance of divine grace to raise their weak but hearty endeavours, to that degree of goodness, which, through their Saviour's merits, will be imputed to them for perfection ; and their title, by virtue of the same merits, to a blessed immortality. --- The man who enjoys the light of revelation cannot, with any shew of reason, urge the corruption of his nature as a justification of his enormity. Such a pretence, when such means and such motives are offered, only argues his want of the first principle of amendment, *viz.* a sincere desire of it. --- The plain truth is, when we lay so much stress upon that favourite plea, the weakness, or the depravity of nature, we shew that we are fond of the notion of it's being unconquerable, because we do not chuse the trouble of a conquest. We

love our vices too well to part with them ; and while the disease is thus pleasing, it is no wonder that we are careless about the remedy.

But the irresolute man may pretend, and perhaps deceive himself with the imagination, that he has a true abhorrence of sin, because he detests it in speculation ; and that all is right *within* him, but that the world *without* throws insurmountable obstacles in the way of his reformation. The imputation of singularity is one of the principal of these : he does not know how to stand against that contempt and ridicule which he supposes he shall draw upon himself by acting in a manner unlike that of the generality of mankind. --- Now it is a strong argument of the perverseness of human judgment, that singularity should be esteemed a reproach to the character of a religious man, though,
in

in so many instances, it is a ground of ostentation. Strange inconsistency! Men will be remarkably vicious, rather than eminently good; they will distinguish themselves by acting against the first principles of reason itself, but cannot bear the idea of rendering themselves particular by proceeding agreeably to them. It seems they expect to be admired in the first case, and ridiculed in the latter. What just grounds they have for their hopes, I shall not at present examine; but their fears appear to want foundation. For after all, is it a real fact, that the contempt of the world is the sure attendant of religious singularity? Is not the contrary rather true? Is not a man of good character generally esteemed and caressed? And what constitutes a good character, but such a share of useful and amiable qualities as serve for

246 S E R M O N X.

marks of distinction, and shew us who is the fittest to be conversed with, and the safest to be trusted? Now a thorough sense and exemplary practice of religion is, in truth, the finishing, the crowning part of this character; because it gives the strongest security for a man's continuing uniform in his conduct, as being directed not by natural temper or caprice, but by a rule which can never suffer it to vary. And what is there reproachable in all this? Indeed it is not religion itself, but the many false modes of it, or the suspected affectation of it, which the world is so apt to laugh at.

But here the irresolute Christian will urge further perhaps, that it is not the unkind opinion, or ill treatment of the world in general, which he is apprehensive of; he will tell
you,

you, the world he stands in awe of comes nearer to him, and is confined within the narrow circle of his friends and acquaintance.---To this it is obvious to reply, -- that such familiarities as are like to counteract his good purposes are not worth maintaining ; nay, that it is highly dangerous to continue them ; and that he cannot give a better proof of his resolution, than by the avoiding of such company as, in all probability, will have an unhappy influence upon his conduct. In short, this is the first step which a prudent man would think of taking. He would from choice, and for safety's sake, throw himself into other hands, and become *a companion of those that fear God.*

But, it will be said, it is not always in a man's power to break off all commerce and conversation with

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his

his old acquaintances, though he hath the best of reasons to desire it. The circumstances and connections of life frequently forbid such a liberty of acting. -- And what is to be done in this case? --- The short answer is ; --- persist as you have begun ; -- be resolute : --- for it is not so much your design which your companions rally, as your supposed weakness and inability to go through with it. They still look upon you as one of their own party, as one too strongly attached to it to leave it ; and therefore cannot but laugh when you talk of deserting them. A man is no longer subject to ridicule upon these occasions, than he himself appears only half serious. His steady and prudent conduct will soon put an end to this common-place railery ; and even those shall silently approve a virtuous determination, who are least likely

likely to imitate it.--- Nay, it is possible, the most dissolute may be moved by such examples of resolution; and a man, by constantly persisting in the work of his own reformation, and so proving by an affecting instance that religion is a thing practicable, may draw over after him proselytes to virtue out of those very persons who were heretofore his associates in iniquity.---The most distant prospect of so happy an event is in itself a considerable incitement to a holy resolution; and a man of a mind naturally generous, and perhaps particularly warmed by sentiments of friendship, will take unspeakable complacency in looking beyond his own immediate preservation to that of others, connected with him by acquaintance, or endeared to him by affection.

And

And thus having shewn the nature and necessity of godly resolution, and the weakness of those excuses which are usually made for the want of it ; I proceed, in the third and last place, to lay down a few general directions for our proceeding in consequence of the same.

Now, whoever is stedfastly purposed to *keep* God's *righteous judgments*, will, in the first place, do well to consider in what instances he has hitherto notoriously transgressed them, and is in danger of transgressing them hereafter. Indeed he cannot avoid doing so, if he is serious and sincere in this business ; and the consequence must be, that he will level his resolution accordingly. One necessary proof of sincerity in repentance, is the renouncing of habitual and favourite vices ; and true resolution admits

mits of no reserve or exception whatsoever. So far from it, that it exerts it's first efforts against these vices. And indeed a contrary method would be preposterous: for to begin with a partial amendment respecting our light faults, with an intention to proceed gradually to a total reformation, respecting our presumptuous offences, is to direct our force against a less danger, while we are threatened by a greater. In truth, a small share of penetration is required (no more than a man's least acquaintance with his own heart will help him to) to discover the secret springs of such a conduct as this. Corrupt nature would part *last* with what it loves *best*. In this spiritual situation, a shew of reformation is kept up, and a kind of mock-fight maintained with those appetites which make least resistance in our constitution; that the mind
may

may be amused with a false ease, and delusive satisfaction, even while we are under the ascendancy of some vicious inclination. For the prevention of the fatal consequences of such self-deceit, it will therefore be necessary, in all our resolutions of amendment, to take the direct contrary method to that which our passions prescribe. It is impossible to be too jealous, or too cautious of their interfering in a concern of this importance. We should make it a point to preclude *their* suggestions, and to disappoint *their* counsels, by resolving against those sins *first*, and most vigorously, which we feel ourselves inclined to leave *last*. --- But although we are principally concerned to disengage ourselves from the chain of our habitual sins, it is also requisite that we turn a careful and vigilant eye towards our *secret faults*; I mean
such

such as are committed inadvertently, and almost without a consciousness of their being faults.--Of this nature are the excesses so frequent in our daily conversation; and especially in our recreations. Upon these occasions, it is too much the fashion of the world to go beyond the bounds of decency and temperance, as by a general licence; and under a notion, that though such indulgencies will not bear a rigorous examination, yet are they rather foibles than faults; rather weaknesses than vices. This notion, however, was never borrowed from Christianity. We may take liberties by mutual consent, but that consent is by no means a gospel dispensation. Every action which implies excess is, no doubt, a sin to a certain degree; and an habitual course of such actions is very sinful in itself, and too probably will lead to sin in it's effects.

For

For the custom of indulging ourselves in these irregularities will not only betray us into many present extravagancies, misbecoming the character of a wise or virtuous man, but leave us likewise open to the assaults of all kinds of temptations. We are undoubtedly safest in a state of discipline, but should at least take care to be always in a state of circumspection. In short, what we are pleased to call infirmities may be the parents, as I may say, of sins confessedly presumptuous; and therefore a man of true resolution will be upon his guard in his leisure hours, and especially at such seasons of familiar and social intercourse, when all thought and reflection is too generally supposed to be superseded.

The last direction I shall offer towards the attainment, as well as the
pro-

prosecution of pious resolutions, and without attending to which all our strongest efforts must prove ineffectual, is, that we look upon it as an indispensable part of our duty to be sincere and constant in our addresses to God for the assistance of his grace for these good purposes.--The gospel covenant promises this so much-wanted succour, and it's most reasonable conditions are---*Ask and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find.* Prayer therefore is the means by which we are to obtain the blessed influence of God's holy Spirit; nor shall we have any more wisdom than piety in us, if we neglect to make the best use of so ready an instrument.---And when the divine grace, effectually implored, once happily co-operates with our own hearty endeavours, our duty will become pleasant to us; and we shall

run

256 S E R M O N X.

run with chearfulness the race that is set before us, animated by the glorious prospect of the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus.

S E R M O N XI.

The propagation of Christianity the
greatest miracle.

Preached on Whit-Sunday.

J O H N XIV. 12.

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that
believeth on me, the works that I do
shall he do also; and greater works
than these shall he do; because I go to
the Father.*

I N this and the next chapter, we
find our Saviour encouraging,
supporting, and comforting his af-
flicted disciples with the promise of

VOL. II.

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the

258 S E R M O N XI.

the Holy Ghost, whom he assures them he will *send to them from the Father*. A consolation this, of which they stood in the utmost need, being so soon to sustain the loss of their beloved Master, and of all things for his sake. The words I have just read are a very considerable branch of this consolation; and I propose to observe,

First, that they must be understood to refer to the miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles on *the day of Pentecost*.

Secondly, to shew in what manner, or respect, the particular promise in the text was fulfilled at that memorable period; and,

Thirdly, to enquire how far all
ages

ages and nations are interested in the original promise of the Holy Ghost.

First, that the words of the text must be understood to refer to the miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost on the *day of Pentecost*, (the great event which the Christian church at this holy season commemorates) is most evident from the reason here assigned by our blessed Saviour for those extraordinary powers which he foretels his disciples they should be endowed with; *Verily, verily I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to the Father.* --- This circumstance plainly directs us to consider the powers in question, as conferred in consequence of our Lord's ascension into heaven, and exaltation to the right hand of God; and ac-

260 S E R M O N XI.

cordingly these powers were actually and visibly communicated in the wonderful effusion of the Holy Ghost on the apostles, and other believers, *not many days* after.

Again. The promise in the text was never in fact verified, except in the supernatural endowments bestowed on the *day of Pentecost*. The apostles did *greater works* than their blessed master had done, by virtue only of those endowments. --- It is true, comparisons have been drawn upon a different foot upon this occasion ; but surely with much more haste than judgment. Some interpreters have cited the miracles wrought by the apostles, St. *Peter* and St. *Paul*, the *shadow* of the former of whom *passing by* cured diseases, as from the body of the latter *handkerchiefs or aprons were brought to the sick, and the diseases departed from them.*

S E R M O N XI. 261

them. --- These miracles, I say, have been produced as exceeding those of our Saviour, and consequently as making good his assurance in the passage before us. But a little attention not so much to the nature of the miracles done by Christ and his apostles respectively, as to the manner in which they were wrought, will convince us that the superiority averred is by no means proved; that therefore such expositors have unhappily misapprehended the matter, and obscured, or rather evacuated the meaning of our Saviour's words, by a supposed necessary, but indeed defective and inadequate explication. Let those words be understood to refer to the great event above mentioned, and, as it will presently appear, every difficulty will vanish in an instant before us.

And, it is farther to be remarked, to the same purpose, that our Saviour had before empowered his apostles to do such of his works as are alluded to in the text. According to St. *Matthew's* account, when he *sent them forth* to preach the gospel, one main branch of their instructions was, that they should *heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils*; and St. *Mark* and St. *Luke*, as well as this evangelist, expressly acquaints us, that he gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases.--Nay the *Seventy* themselves had a general commission to *heal the sick*; and we find, by their own report to our Saviour, that *even the devils were subject unto them thro' his name*. -- All these commissions, it will be granted, were indeed temporary and occasional only; -- but still as the miracles, performed by the authority

thority conveyed by them, were precisely of the same nature with that of those wrought by our Lord in his own person, we are necessarily led to infer, that in assuring his apostles they should *do greater works* than he had done, he refers to works of a different kind, and of a tendency much more noble and important ; or, in other words, to the *works* which they should be enabled to do, when they should be *endued with power from on high on the day of Pentecost*.

And, I would farther desire to observe, that though the *diversities of gifts*, which St. Paul makes mention of, were most unquestionably communicated to the apostles at that time by the Holy Spirit, yet the only *power* specified by the sacred history was that of their speaking *with other tongues*, and being qualified thereby

264 S E R M O N XI.

to put in immediate and full execution our Lord's prior commission to them to go, *and teach all nations.* This miraculous ability therefore, together with the no less amazing success of their exertion of it in the propagation of the Christian faith; and, if possible, their still more extraordinary privilege of conferring the *gift of the Holy Ghost* upon others, barely by *laying on of their hands*: -- these several particulars, I say, are a sure direction to us where to look for the most ample and literal completion of the promise contained in my text. The *gifts of healing*, and of *working of miracles* in general, with which, as was observed, the apostles had heretofore been occasionally furnished, were, no doubt, confirmed and perpetuated to them at the time we are speaking of: but these were not the *best gifts* of the Holy Ghost, nor, for that

S E R M O N XI. 265

that reason, the gifts by which they were capacitated to do *greater works* than their *Master and Lord* had done before them.

And, let it be once more observed under this head, that the Holy Ghost had been imparted in certain measures and proportions, and answerably to particular purposes, at different times, and to different persons, long before the period in question. *In old time*, St. Peter gives us to understand, *holy men spake as they were moved by the holy Ghost*; and under the *Mosaic dispensation*, *the Spirit of God came on many*; and afterwards, *John the Baptist*, his father *Zacharias*, and others, are said to have been *filled with the Holy Ghost*.--When our blessed Saviour, after his resurrection, gave his apostles their commission in the following words, according to
St.

266 S E R M O N XI.

St. *John's* gospel; *As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you, he breathed on them,* says the Evangelist, and said unto them, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost;* and, beyond all doubt, the solemnity of that action, and of that expression, must denote not merely an actual, but a considerable communication of the *Spirit*. But, notwithstanding all this, strictly and properly speaking, *the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified; i. e.* the *Holy Ghost* had not yet descended personally, as it were, and visibly upon the apostles and first believers; which he was not to do till after, and in consequence, and evidence of our Lord's exaltation. It was on the *day of Pentecost* that the *Holy Ghost* was given in the fullest and truest manner; was *shed forth*, as St. *Peter* strongly expresses it, in one passage of his sermon on the occasion;

S E R M O N XI. 267

caſion; or, as he ſtill more ſtrongly delivers himſelf in another, was *poured out* for the great ends and purpoſes already taken notice of. In ſhort, it was on the *day of Pentecoſt*, that the apoſtles, according to the emphatically ſignificant expreſſion of our Lord himſelf, and agreeably to the remarkable prediction of the *Baptiſt*, were *baptized with the Holy Ghoſt and with fire*. It was conſequently on the *day of Pentecoſt* that our Saviour's promiſe to his apoſtles, that they ſhould do *greater works* than he had done, was exactly and wonderfully fulfilled. --But this will be more manifeſt, by conſidering,

Secondly, and more particularly, in what manner, or reſpect this promiſe was accompliſhed at that memorable period; or how, and why the *works* done by the apoſtles by virtue
of

268 S E R M O N XI.

of this effusion of the *Holy Ghost*, may be said to be greater than those which were done by our Lord himself *in the days of his flesh*.

That by the *power* which the apostles were to be *endued with from on high*, we are principally to understand the power of speaking *with new tongues*, as the *Spirit* should give them *utterance*, is sufficiently evident, I presume, from the preceding considerations; and to this power the above-named pre-eminence is justly to be ascribed, will, I apprehend, be as evident, if we consider it in it's several views, consequences, and connexions.

Now, in the first place, the *gift of tongues*, or the power of speaking all languages by instantaneous inspiration, considered merely as a miracle, recom-

S E R M O N XI. 269

recommends itself in an especial manner to our attention and wonder, from it's strangeness and novelty. It was indeed the first of it's kind, and remains so to this day. Our Lord had frequently *opened the mouths of the dumb* ; -- but that *unlearned and ignorant men* should in a moment be able to *speak the wonderful works of God* in foreign tongues, who before could scarcely express themselves in their own with propriety -- this was a singular miracle, which the Great *Author of our Faith* had reserved, at once, to do honour to his first servants and followers, and (as will presently more plainly appear) to testify, adorn, and complete his own triumph over the *powers of darkness*. -- Accordingly, we find this extraordinary event was received by all them who were competent judges of it, (the great multitude of foreign proselytes assembled at *Jerusalem* on the
day

day of Pentecost on account of the feast) with every imaginable circumstance of astonishment. They were all *amazed*, and *marvelled*; they were *confounded*; they *were in doubt*; they exclaimed -- *What meaneth this?* I said, competent judges; because such were not the native Jews, who ignorantly and ridiculously imputed all this to the effects of intoxication, and supposed that to be jargon and nonsense which *they* did not understand.

Secondly, this miracle is signalized beyond those of our blessed Lord himself, by the particular circumstances of time, place, and manner of exhibition.---With regard to the time of the *Holy Ghost's* descent on the *day of Pentecost*, there was a wonderful coincidence of propriety; and that in the following respects; *viz.* that this was one of the great feasts,
at

S E R M O N XI. 271

at which the Jews were obliged to attend from all parts, to present themselves before the Lord in the temple at *Jerusalem*; so that here was a prodigious concourse of witnesses to carry the report of this great event all over the world; with this further propriety, that the same persons who had been spectators of the lowest debasement of the blessed Jesus at the Passover, namely, his crucifixion, became now witnesses of his divine power and exaltation.--It is also very remarkable, that this was the *first day of the week*, which was the day of our Lord's resurrection likewise; so that to render that day truly venerable and holy, the whole scheme of our salvation was accomplished on it; as has clearly been intimated, and as we shall have occasion more fully to remark again.-- We may add, what is no less remarkable, that this was
the

272 S E R M O N XI.

the same day on which the *Law* was given on Mount *Sinai*; and we cannot but remark a striking propriety, that the gospel was then published with equal, though less terrible, solemnity and magnificence from Mount *Sion*.--Accordingly I observed, that the place and manner of this illustrious display of omnipotence were worth our notice. The apostles were strictly charged to wait for the accomplishment of their great Master's promise to them at *Jerusalem*, the appointed scene of this wonderful dispensation. The propriety of this appointment appears, in part, from what has been already said upon this subject; and it will be sufficient to add, that by the accomplishment of the above-mentioned promise in this city, was gloriously fulfilled the prediction of two prophets -- *Out of Sion shall go forth the law, and the word of*

of the Lord from Jerusalem.-- And as to the manner in which the *power from on high* was communicated, it well deserves our attention. Every circumstance was full of affecting splendor and significancy. The *sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind* was a significant emblem of the force, the converting and purifying efficacy of the *Holy Ghost*; and reminds us, that as *the Spirit of God* at first *moved upon the face of the chaotic waters*, for the creation of the *material* world; so by his miraculous descent and influx on the apostles, he now renewed the *moral*.--The divided tongues were a lively and apt representation of that prompt and piercing eloquence, expressing itself distinctly in various languages, with which the apostles were endowed. Thus were they honoured with *a sign from heaven*; a kind of evidence

which the Jews had perversely desired; and by the gift of divers tongues were fitted to be the happy instruments of uniting many nations in one religion, whom a diversity and confusion of languages had once divided and dispersed *over the face of the earth*.--Which circumstance suggests to our more particular consideration,

Thirdly, the immediate effects of this glorious and amazing transaction. These we shall find to have been of a nature much superior to that of those which were produced by our Saviour's miracles in the course of his ministry.---As to the immediate effect of the miracle of this day upon the apostles themselves,---in an instant they found their *understandings opened*, their minds *enlightened*, and filled with divine knowledge, and all their
their

their doubts, ignorances, and prejudices, dispelled like mists before the sun; to the experimental accomplishment of their Lord's promise, that the Holy Spirit should *teach them all things* necessary for them to know, and teach others; and should *guide them into all truth*; or, as it might be rendered perhaps more properly, all *the truth*; i. e. should rightly and thoroughly instruct them in the whole scheme of human redemption, set in one view the œconomy of grace before them, and *make known* to them *the mystery of the gospel*. In short, they perceived, they felt all their faculties wonderfully strengthened; and their memories in particular, according to their Lord's promise also, quickened as it were with a readiness in recollecting and applying his doctrines, precepts, and predictions:---they felt, I say, and ac-

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276 S E R M O N XI.

knowledged all this sudden alteration
 in themselves with as much astonish-
 ment and transport, as we may sup-
 pose might arise in the first created
 man, upon the recent perception of
 his being and his powers ; with the
 additional satisfaction of the most
 sensible assurance that their Lord was
 the God of all might and power, as
 well as of the most perfect goodness
 and veracity.---No wonder therefore
 that they became presently other men
 in their conduct, as well as their ap-
 prehensions and abilities ; that they
 no longer feared the face of man in
 the cause of God and truth, but
 pleaded on the behalf of both before
 the higher powers with that admira-
 ble presence of mind, that noble
 boldness, that persuasive eloquence,
 that irresistible authority, which they
 were so soon and so often called upon
 to exert.---Such were the first teach-
 ers

ers of Christianity ; so divinely qualified for preaching *the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to their trust*. And their success was answerable both to their zeal and to their qualifications. For (to remind you of the effects of this gracious dispensation upon others also) *the same day, as the sacred history informs us, there were added unto them about three thousand souls*. Happy *first-fruits* these, of that spiritual harvest which ensued in so great abundance ! For so rapid was the progress and propagation of Christianity from this period, *so mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed against all the opposition of carnal prejudice and worldly aversion, as well as of ancient establishments religious and political, that within the compass of thirty years Christian churches were planted in most parts*

278 S E R M O N XI.

of the known world.---And what less could be expected from the labours of men inspired with supernatural ability, and equal resolution? The power of speaking fluently all languages was not only the necessary means of propagating divine truth, but in itself an incontestable evidence of it. A preacher thus endued was himself a greater miracle than any he could work besides; and could not utter his doctrine without attesting his commission.---But if the effects of the descent of the Holy Ghost on the apostles and first believers be thus amazing in speculation, let us,

Fourthly, take a view of them in a moral or practical light, and we shall find no less to our comfort than astonishment, that this dispensation was that *grace of God which bringeth salvation.* The *Holy Ghost* was given
not

not barely for the purpose of the conviction of the apostles and *their company*, and (as we shall presently see more at large) of such as should *believe* afterward *through their word*, but for their conversion too; or, he *was given*, as St. Paul expresses himself, *to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God; to purify their minds; to make them clean hearts; to renew their inward man; to confirm and strengthen them in virtue as well as faith; and, in a word, to redeem them from all iniquity, and to purify to God a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*---The apostles, by virtue of their invaluable privilege of communicating the Holy Ghost to others, may be said, in the most strict and literal sense, to have *healed the broken-hearted, purged the consciences of men from dead works,*

and *quicken'd them that were dead* (twice dead, to apply the emphatical words of St *Jude*) *in trespasses and sins.*---When our Saviour in his own person *open'd* the corporeal *eyes of the blind*, or made *the deaf to hear*, and *the dumb to speak*, what did he do comparable with this? Is not the cure of the body (to which alone the words of the text have reference) an operation less useful, less beneficial, as well as less wonderful, than the renovation of the soul? Is not the work of *regeneration*, the making of *a new creature*, the *renewing of the spirit of the mind*, if considered in its full importance and consequence, a *greater work* than that of restoring a dead body to animal life. Ultimately indeed, *not unto* the apostles, but unto their *glorified* master, is the *praise* and honour of all these things to be ascribed :---but still, that they
were

S E R M O N XI. 281

were his immediate instruments in the performance ; that they were by him enabled to *speak* his word to *all people*, not only *bodily*, but infallibly, not only earnestly, but efficaciously ; that *by his name* they could *stretch forth* their hands to *heal*, and do *signs and wonders*, and *wonderful works*, even *greater works* than he had himself done *whilst he was with them* ; ---all this is an abundantly sufficient verification of the promise he had given them.

But what enhanced beyond expression the value of the *gifts of the Holy Ghost* in general, was their permanency ; a circumstance, which hath already been mentioned. *I will pray the Father*, (says our blessed Lord) *and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.* This assurance follows
very

282 S E R M O N XI.

very soon after the promise of the text; and the import of it is indeed capable of being extended beyond the apostolic age *even unto the end of the world*. And did this admit of a doubt, St. Peter's declaration on the day of Pentecost clears up the matter at once. *The promise, (says he to an audience pricked in their heart by his previous discourse to them) the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.* Which circumstance leads me,

Thirdly, to enquire how far all ages and nations are interested in the original promise of the Holy Ghost.

That they are in a due proportion and degree so interested is most evident;---because *the gifts and calling of God* must be as much *without partiality*

S E R M O N X I. 283

lity as repentance. For the ascertain-
ment of this matter, we may remark
then, that the *gift of the Holy Ghost*
has a two-fold reference, the one to
the establishment of the Christian
faith, the other to the confirmation
of the Christian life. To the for-
mer the extraordinary gifts of the
spirit were excellently adapted; but
the ordinary gifts of the same, as they
ever were, so they ever will be neces-
sary for the latter. These extraordinary
gifts were purely temporary from the
nature of the thing, and what St.
Paul declares of the *gift of tongues*
in particular may be applied to mira-
cles in general; *viz.* that *they are*
for a sign, not to them that believe, but
to them that believe not; whereas the
gifts of sanctification and regeneration,
which for distinction's sake we call
the ordinary gifts of the spirit, are
not more requisite at one period than
at

at another. In allusion to these the apostle seems to tell *Titus*, that Christ hath *saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost* : agreeably to which, the same apostle reminds his *Ephesian* converts, that *after they had believed, they were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise* : and assures the *Corinthians*, that *he which stablished them in Christ, and had anointed them, was God*.---And, in respect of these ordinary gifts and graces, he likewise warns the above-mentioned *Ephesians* not to grieve the *Holy Spirit of God, whereby they were sealed unto the day of redemption*. Correspondently with all this, he gives the *Thessalonians* charge, to *quench not the Spirit* ; and directs the *Romans*, to *walk in the Spirit* ; as Christians in general are said to be *led by the Spirit*. ---It is needless to cite texts to this purpose ; or to observe, that all these assurances

S E R M O N XI. 285

assurances, directions, and declarations, are applicable to the case of all believers at this day.---In truth, that remarkable prophecy of *John the Baptist*, (before cited)---*He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire*,---which has so manifest a reference to the descent of the spirit on the *day of Pentecost*, was beyond all dispute address'd to the people in general;--it cannot reasonably be restrained to those miraculous and extraordinary gifts which qualified the apostles and first preachers of the gospel to propagate Christian truth, but is to be considered as comprehensive also of those gracious inspirations and impulses, (which, by the way, as things supernatural are of a miraculous kind likewise,) whereby both apostles and others once were, as both pastors and people now are, enabled to discharge their several Christian duties and obligations.

286 S E R M O N XI.

ligations. But our Saviour's own doctrine and assurances in the gospel render this matter still clearer. *Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, says he, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* The expression is of an import as universal as possible; and as it plainly ascribes the work of regeneration to the Holy Ghost, so does it as plainly imply the absolute necessity of such new birth to the spiritual life of Christians throughout all ages. And accordingly we see how far and in what sense, every true believer is interested at this day in those assurances of our Lord to his apostles, that they should be *endued with power from on high*,---that the spirit should *abide with them for ever*,---and that he would be *with them always, even unto the end of the world*.---It may not be amiss just to add, that the peculiar title of the Holy Ghost

Ghost in scripture, that of *the Comforter*, by which our Saviour mentions him to his apostles, when he encourages and consoles them before his departure from the world, has evidently a relation to future generations. And it is worth remembring, in confirmation of this point, that the original word which we translate ---*Comforter*, according to the just remark of some commentators, of extensive signification; and might with equal propriety have been rendered by the term---*exhorter*,---or *advocate*---Now it is certain there is nothing in either of the three terms that can be said to be peculiar to the times of the apostles, or the early ages of the church; and consequently, with respect to these standing and perpetual offices, these common gifts and graces, all nations and ages are interested in the original promise of
the

the Holy Ghost.---As for the case of those to whom the gospel was never preached, and who *have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost*;---it becomes us not too nicely to enquire into the grounds of *his dispensations, whose judgments are unsearchable, and whose ways past finding out* ! Such disquisitions are at best more curious, than useful. Suffice it to observe in general, that we have good reason to hope millions may be saved at all times and in all places, through the infinite and invaluable merits of an unknown, but universal Redeemer, and by virtue of uncovenanted grace. Suffice it at least to be assured, that we ourselves are interested in the œconomy of heaven;---and that the three persons of the undivided Trinity, God the Father, in our creation; God the Son, in our redemption; and God the

S E R M O N X I. 289

the Holy Ghost, in our sanctification ; effected by his real though imperceptible motions, disposing us to every good work ; suffice it I say, that this “ holy, blessed, and glorious “ Trinity ” graciously concurred in the scheme, and wonderfully concerted the means of our eternal salvation ; and therefore to this adorable Trinity, three persons and one God, be ascribed all power, and might, and dominion, and glory, now, henceforth, and for evermore.

Amen.

F I N I S.

VOL. II.

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SEPMON XI. 289

the Holy Ghost, in our satisfaction;
effected by his real though imper-
ceptible motions, disposing us to
every good work; justice it I say,
that this "holy, blessed, and glorious
Trinity" graciously condescend in
the scheme, and graciously con-
ceded the means of our redemption;
various; and hence the Father, Son,
and Holy Trinity, who are one
God, be eternally glorified and
might, and dominion, and glory,
now, hereafter, and for evermore.
Amen.

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Vol. II. T

